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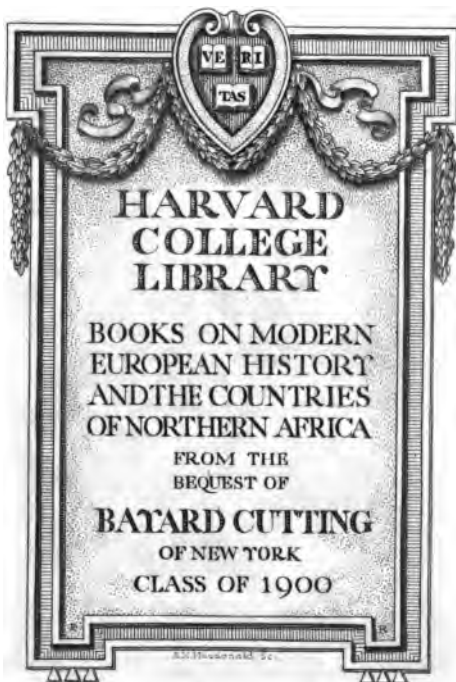
MY ALPINE JUBILEE

FREDERIC HARRISON

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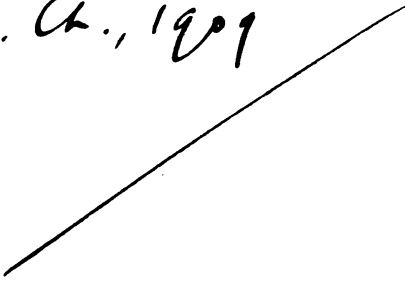
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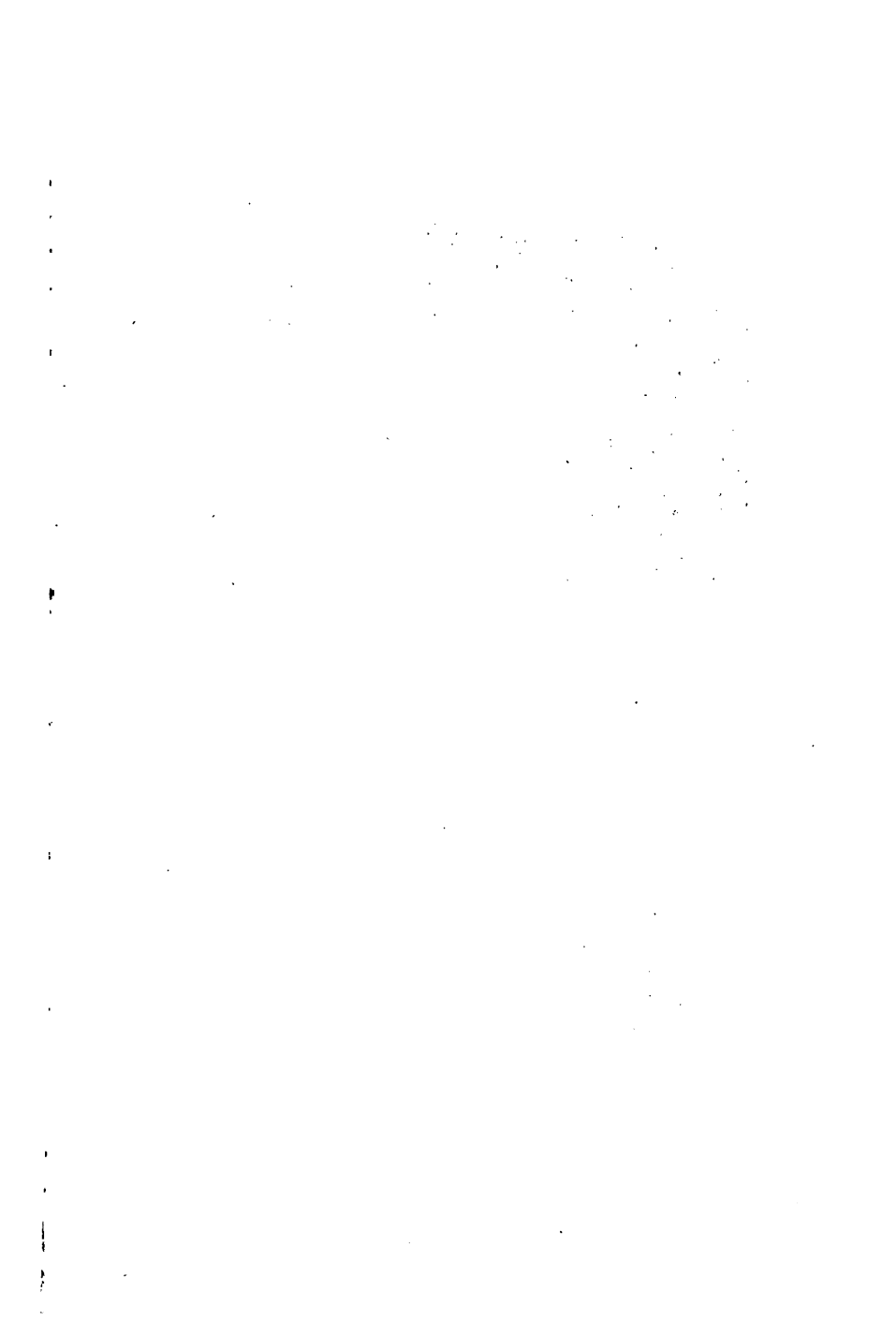
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Fredrick Harris
December, 1907.

MY ALPINE JUBILEE

1851—1907

BY

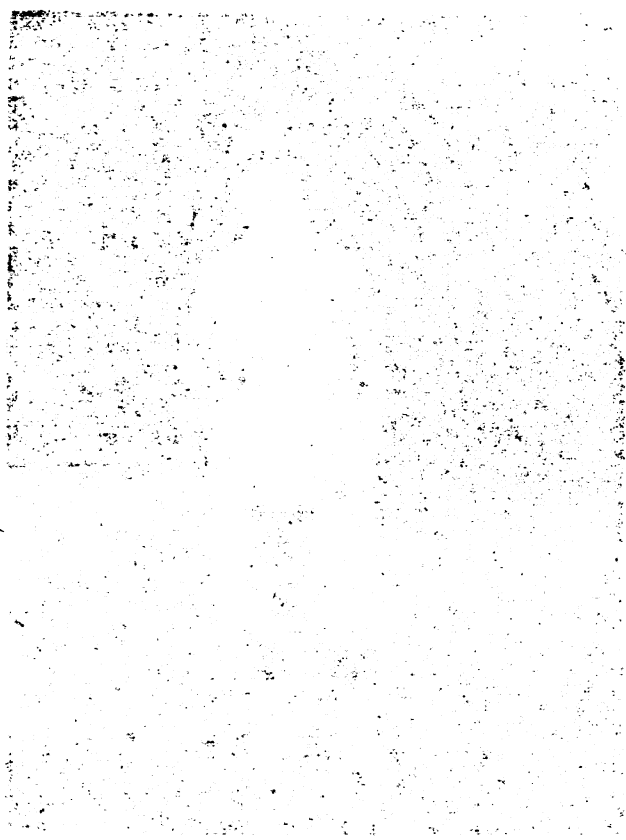
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LONDON

SMITH, ELDER, & CO., 15 WATERLOO PLACE

1908

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Johnnie Harris
December

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MY ALPINE JUBILEE

1851—1907

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1908

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TO THE MEMORY
OF
SIR LESLIE STEPHEN

Teucro duce, et auspice Teucro—
Cras ingens iterabimus aequor

PREFACE

HAVING been the guest of the Alpine Club at their recent Jubilee, I consented to collect in a volume some pieces that I had written on Mountaineering from my own experience which long preceded the origin of the Club. And I have prefaced them with some Letters which during my visit to Switzerland last year I wrote home to my wife and daughter.

The six Letters (pp. 1-70) were written from Lake Lemman last October and were copied for the printers in the form in which they arrived. Two of them appeared in the 'Cornhill Magazine' of December 1907. Then follow an extract from my article on Sir Leslie Stephen, which was in the 'Cornhill Magazine,' April 1904 ; and two Letters printed in 'The

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'Times' in September 1906 and in October 1868, the latter describing an extraordinary flood in the Italian Lakes. The last piece is the article on 'Mountaineering' which I wrote for the 'Westminster Review,' October 1864, the year in which I joined Leslie Stephen in his ascent on Mont Blanc.

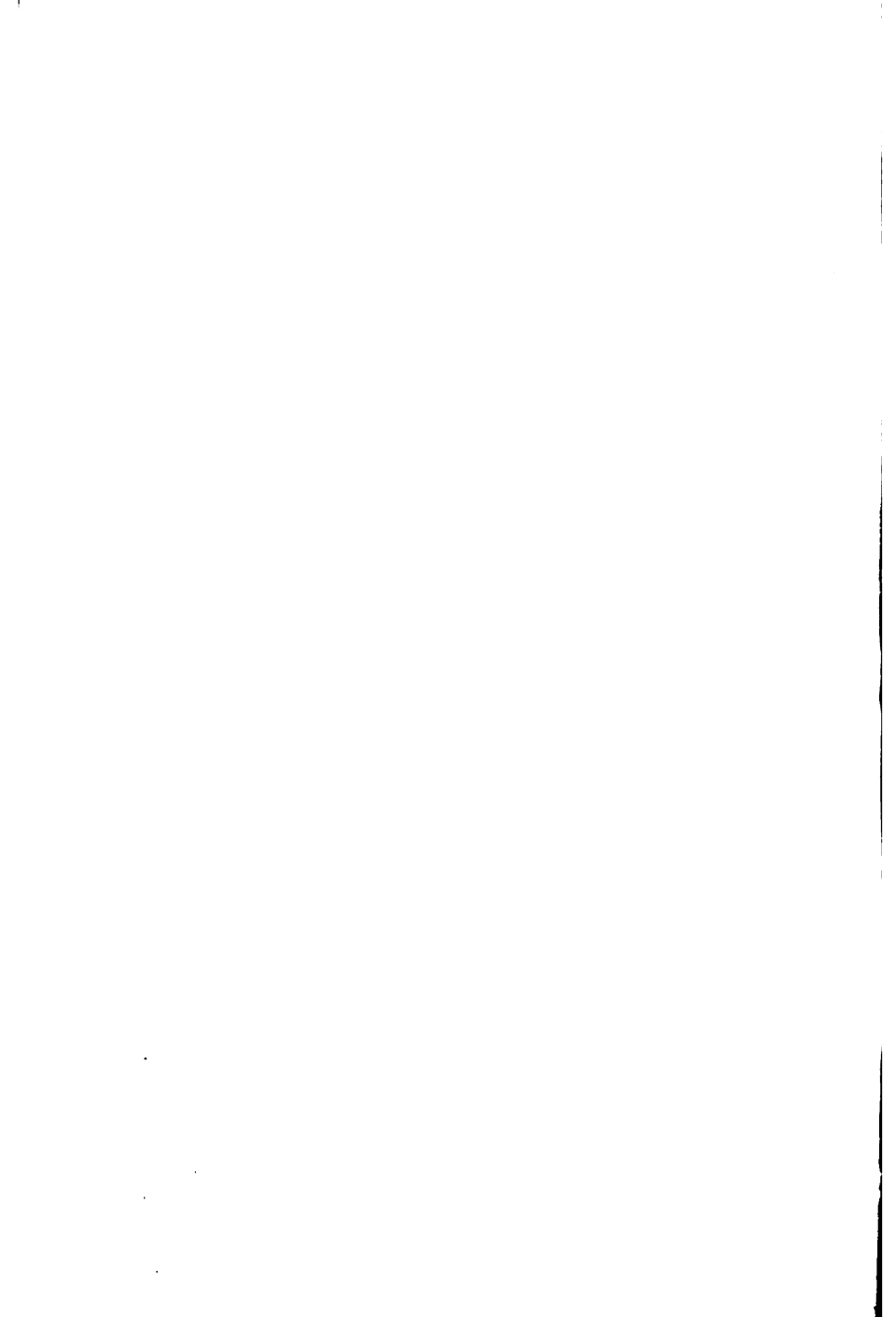
I have to thank the proprietors of the 'Cornhill Magazine,' of 'The Times,' and the 'Westminster Review' for permission to use these articles.

F. H.

HAWKHURST: *December 1907.*

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LETTER I

))

Glion : Oct. 1, 1907

I LIVE again—I have breathed once more the air of the ‘iced mountain top’—my heart expands at the sight of my beloved Alps. After fifty-six years the mountain fever throbs in my old veins. Bunyan’s Pilgrim did not hail the vision of the Delectable Hills with more joy and consolation.

Yes! you were wise to urge me to seek rest and change of thought in my old haunts, even though you were unable to travel yourself. There is no such rest, such change, in the world. I have been here but ten days, and it seems ten months. The air, the sounds, the landscape, the life—all are new—and yet how full of old memories—how fresh to-day and yet how far off in remembrance. Half a century has not dimmed the

glory of these eternal rocks, of these familiar marvels. And old age only makes us more able to drink in all their charm, for it makes us dwell on them with more patient love and reverence, with a wider knowledge of all that Nature means, all that it inspires, of all the myriad chords whereby it attunes the soul.

Once more—perhaps for the last time—I listen to the unnumbered tinkling of the cow-bells on the slopes—‘the sweet bells of the sauntering herd’—to the music of the cicadas in the sunshine, and the shouts of the neat-herd lads, echoing back from Alp to Alp. I hear the burbling of the mountain rill, I watch the emerald moss of the pastures gleaming in the light, and now and then the soft white mist creeping along the glen, as our poet says, ‘puts forth an arm and creeps from pine to pine.’ And see, the wild flowers, even in this waning season of the year, the delicate lilac of the dear autumn crocus,* which seems to start

* The *Colchicum alpinum*, that lovely, poisonous little plant, once famous in medicine.

up elf-like out of the lush grass, the coral beads of the rowan, and the beech-trees just begun to wear their autumn jewelry of old gold.

As I stroll about these hills, more leisurely, more thoughtfully than I used to do of old in my hot mountaineering days, I have tried to think out what it is that makes the Alpine landscape so marvellous a tonic to the spirit—what is the special charm of it to those who have once felt all its inexhaustible magic. Other lands have rare beauties, wonders of their own, sights to live in the memory for ever. In France, in Italy, in Spain, in Greece and in Turkey, I hold in memory many a superb landscape. From boyhood upwards I thirsted for all kinds of Nature's gifts, whether by sea, or by river, lake, mountain, or forest. For sixty years at least I have roved about the white cliffs, the moors, the riversides, lakes, and pastures of our own islands from Penzance to Cape Wrath, from Beachy Head to the Shetlands. I love them all. But they cannot touch me, as do the Alps, with the sense at once of inexhaustible loveliness and

of a sort of conscious sympathy with every fibre of man's heart and brain. Why then is this so ?

I find it in the immense range of the moods in which Nature is seen in the Alps, at least by those who have fully absorbed all the forms, sights, sounds, wonders, and adventures they offer. An hour's walk will show them all in profound contrast and yet in exquisite harmony. The Alps form a book of Nature as wide and as mysterious as Life.

Earth has no scenes of placid fruitfulness more balmy than the banks of one of the larger lakes, crowded with vineyards, orchards, groves and pastures, down to the edge of its watery mirror, wherein, beside a semi-tropical vegetation, we see the image of some mediæval castle, of some historic tower, and thence the eye strays up to sunless gorges, swept with avalanches, and streaming with feathery cascades ; and higher yet one sees against the sky line ranges of terrific crags, girt with glaciers, and so often wreathed in storm clouds.

All that Earth has of most sweet, softest, easiest, most suggestive of languor and love, of fertility and abundance—here is seen in one vision beside all that Nature has most hard, most cruel, most unkind to Man—where life is one long weary battle with a frost-bitten soil, and every peasant's hut has been built up stone by stone, and log by log, with sweat and groans, and wrecked hopes. In a few hours one may pass from an enchanted garden, where every sense is satiated, and every flower and leaf and gleam of light is intoxication, up into a wilderness of difficult crags and yawning glaciers, which men can reach only by hard-earned skill, tough muscles and iron nerves.

All this is seen in the Alps in one vision, and floods the mind with those infinitely varied contrasts which roll on side by side in the aspects of Nature and in the course of Human Life. To know, to feel, to understand the Alps is to know, to feel, to understand Humanity.

The Ocean in all its moods has these contrasts—its terrible furies, its vast horizon, its

glassy calm. Its ever-changing aspects open to the mind resources and spaces infinite, with ominous presages of storm : resources such as promise marvellous new means to man, presages which threaten him with cruel death. But Ocean has no history, no fruits, no signs of human victory and achievement. With all its limitless volume and ceaseless motion, it is to Man's eye a lifeless, inhuman waste, as indeed Byron felt.

And so, too, is the Desert of Africa, the Veld, the Prairie of the Far West, and the Pampas. All have their visions of beauty ; and to some spirits they speak things which very few can tell us in words. A moor that confronts Snowdon or Helvellyn, or one from which we watch the Cuillins of Skye or the Blue Hills of Killarney—all have their special charm. But they are Nature out of touch with Man—and this is no doubt the source of their power to move us with a sense of inspiration or of rest.

Italy has history, beauty, variety ; and so indeed has Southern France. But with all

their beauty and power over the imagination and the memory, neither of these historic lands, apart from their mountains—and the Alps of course are in France, in Italy, in Germany, as well as in Switzerland—neither Italy nor France, nor Germany, as distinct from their great mountain chains, possesses those thrilling contrasts of exquisite loveliness, of rich abundance, side by side with appalling shapes of Nature in her most majestic scorn and wrath.

Only the Alps have these deep tragic contrasts, washing out the soul, as tragedy does, with pity and terror. The Alps are international, European, Humanitarian. Four written languages are spoken in their valleys, and ten times as many local patois. The Alps are not specially Swiss—I used to think they were English—they belong equally to four nations of Europe: they are the *sanatorium* and the *diversorium* of the civilised world, the refuge, the asylum, the second home of men and women famous throughout the centuries for arts, literature, thought, religion. The poet, the philosopher, the dreamer, the patriot,

the exile, the bereaved, the reformer, the prophet, the hero—have all found in the Alps a haven of rest, a new home where the wicked cease from troubling, where men need neither fear nor suffer. The happy and the thoughtless, the thinker and the sick—are alike at home here. The patriot exile inscribed on his house on Lake Lemman—*omne solum forti patria*. What he might have written is—*omnibus hoc solum patria*. To young and old, to strong and weak, to wise and foolish alike, the Alps are a second Fatherland. And yet here, for my part, I think more and more of my own Fatherland and of the dear ones I have left behind me.

LETTER II

Col de Jaman : Oct. 2, 1907

I AM just back from a glorious stroll up to Jaman. Do you remember how Byron tells us in his Diary of his ride over the pass from Vevey towards the Oberland, just ninety years ago in this very autumn season? He jots down in his Letters and Diary the sensation of delight it gave him, great traveller as he then was. Never had he seen such an ideal of pastoral life—not even in the mountains of Albania or Greece.. I saw that luscious valley to-day through Byron's eyes. The Lake was gleaming in the Sun, fringed with scattered hamlets, chalets, villas and gardens—changed alas! since Byron wrote his poem on Chillon, since Julie and Saint-Preux whispered together in the bosquets—but not yet spoiled—more

cultivated, civilised, and modernised, but even richer in vegetation, more crowded with human enjoyments.

I passed up through orchards and groves of chestnut, acacia, and beech woods, past many a sub-tropical terrace, *berceau*, and *parterre*, such as we see only here, in Italy, and along the Mediterranean. Then came the open pastures, deep with lush grass in their second and third crop, studded with brown, pitchy, roomy log-built chalets, each a confused mass of *greniers*, cowsheds, wooden balconies, and spreading eaves. The ceaseless cow-bells tinkled in a gentle but mild harmony, in scattered groups far and near, whilst high above the herds were being gathered and brought down to their winter stalls, amidst incessant shouts of the herdsmen, re-echoed from the crags. Far and near the eye roamed over hanging valleys clothed with woods and copses of larch, pine, and mountain ash, thence to distant lower plains—all gleaming with toothsome pasture, gay wild flowers, inexhaustible industry, and healthy homes.

Hour by hour I trudged on upwards far more leisurely than when I trod this path fifty years ago—more slowly but more full of thought—and indeed quite as happy and elated as then in my muscular and idle youth. Right and left many thousands of feet above one rose the bare and cruel teeth of Jaman and of Naye, a range of serrated crags, seamed with *couloirs*, down which in spring torrents of snow and rock tumble and crash and tear deep rents in the precipice. From time to time my path crossed an avalanche track, down which six months earlier were wont to thunder masses which could crush a village and flood a plain. Many a tall pine lay torn across the track, snapped in two or wrenched up by its roots. What a symbol of a wrecked life is the stump of a whitened trunk, blasted by lightning or battered down by a volley of rocks, as it lies helpless in the midst of a delicious copse that seems planted only for man's enjoyment and use !

And then the highest pines were passed and the path had to zig-zag amidst stones as

sharp as knives. There at length desolation showed itself in its solitude and its nakedness. There the hardiest pines could not endure the blasts of autumn, the ice of winter. A goat here and there could pick some weeds for a week or two yet. But to-morrow, it may be, in a few short weeks certainly, these bare pinnacles and ridges would be deep beneath a mantle of snow, coated with hard ice, and inaccessible except for an hour or two to any but the hardiest mountaineer, and that only with all the resources experience can give.

At last I stood upon the topmost crag ; and what a vision it opened ! Far to the East was the line of Oberland ranges—the white peaks of Jungfrau and Wetterhorn, Giant and Monk—to the South the silver *aiguilles* of Mont Blanc, the Dent du Midi, all his sullen fangs powdered with fresh snow, the Diablerets and the long rasping vista of the Savoy Alps ; Westwards the soft expanse of Leman, Swiss lowlands, and distant Jura, studded with busy towns, thriving villages, orchards, pastures, churches, vineyards in their flowing vintages,

industry, plenty, peace, and health, as if Earth and Man had combined to frame a Paradise.

All this in one inexhaustible panorama. All that Nature has of sweetest, richest, dearest—of hardest, wildest, most grim, most deathly. Satiated with the splendour and the manifold sides of this landscape, I slowly tramped down across rocks, meadows and orchards, and as I came down at last upon the beaming lake-side, I felt it would almost be a relief if only, like one of Rousseau's *petits maîtres*, I could vent the emotion in tears.

There is hardly a spot round this most poetic and historic corner of Europe, this Lake Lemman and its neighbouring valleys and mountains, but what recalls to us some line of poetry, some passage of romance, a great literary triumph, a memorable conflict, an illustrious career, an heroic death. Poets made the charm of Greece. But poets, romancers, dramatists, moralists, historians, theologians, artists—all combine to give a special halo of charm to the Alps and the Alpine world at large. Byron, Rousseau, Voltaire, Gibbon,

Shelley, Coleridge, Turner, Ruskin, Schiller, Manzoni, Scott—have all stamped on the mind of Europe their special ideas of this region.

Rousseau was the first to see its poetry, but he saw only one side of it. Coleridge chanted a magnificent Hymn in the valley of Mont Blanc. Shelley loved the Sea too much to be the true lover of the Alps. The lover, the poet, the Prophet of the Alps is Byron. Only he felt all the beauty, all the majesty, all the humanity, all the terror of the Alps—the pastoral simplicity, the love-lorn memories, the flashing storms, thundering avalanches, stupendous cataracts of the higher Alps, the awful solitudes of the Upper Snowfields, where Man stands fearless and even masterful face to face with the very Spirit of Earth.

All this only Byron saw and felt and told. Who could have written *Manfred* but Byron? Where could Byron have placed Manfred but in the Alps? Can we imagine Manfred even on Scafell or on the Puy de Dôme? Byron and the Alps are of kin. Two others of our men knew the Alps better than Byron, even

saw their charm more truly, but not their awe nor their majesty with equal power. By the side of Byron we have to place both Ruskin and Turner.

In the Alps I sometimes frame in a single view an imaginary panorama of the long history of Man and Man's earth. As I look down from the rocks which tower above Glion I realise how those fierce fangs of the mighty Dent, of Diablerets, of d'Argentière, the long spurs of Chablais in Savoy, are themselves but the débris of primeval Himalayas, from which monstrous glaciers descended to scoop out the Lake. I see in the mind's eye the prehistoric tribes, whose origin, race, language, manners no man now can tell us, building out into the shallows of the Lake their huts on piles, to secure a home from enemies and beasts. I see them fishing, hunting, weaving and fighting with needles and hooks of bone, knives and axes of stone—at the dawn of civilisation in Europe.

I see hordes of barbarians from North and East storming the Roman camps, and driving

back the legions on their road to the Eternal City. I watch the swarms of Hun, Burgundian, Aleman, and Goth, as they tramp along the military roads of the Empire on which Caesar and Hadrian, Aurelius, Constantine, and Julian were used to post out and home, from the Seine and the Danube to the Tiber. I see the monks and Christian missions pushing their way up into the pagan valleys, and planting here and there an abbey and a church. I see the ebb and flow of feudal lord and free town, the castle built out into the Lake or crowning some dominant rock, the watch-towers, walls and gates of the burgher militia, the deadly tussle of Savoy, Hapsburg, Zähringer, and Nassau. I hear the fierce quarrels and fiercer battles of Catholic and Reformer, the bitter fight of one hundred years which ended in drawn battle and equal partition of the soil and of rule.

From hence I perceive the hills that look down on the earlier homes of Swiss liberty, and the bloody field of Morat, where proud Burgundy met his second crushing blow.

Far and wide, from Leman to the Jura, lies a land of plenty, industry, peace and freedom—the refuge of men hunted by priest and king. The extreme horizon almost touches the asylum of the wonderful old man who shook altars and thrones with a pen that dripped sulphuric acid and shot electric sparks. Beneath my feet lies the home of Rousseau, the scenes of his morbid imagination, his sickly egoism, his inimitable witchery of words. Ah ! now I see the hillside where the historian wrote the last chapter of his last volume and sighed to feel that it was at an end. Byron, Shelley, Ruskin, poets, historians, divines, have made every village memorable in the literature of the world. And from Caesar to Charlemagne, from Rudolph to Napoleon, every great ruler in Europe has graven his record on the Alps.

We are apt to fancy that the charm of the Alps lies in Nature unalloyed with life and untouched by man. Far from it ! The whole region, from its physical form, its central position, its barriers and gates between the

nations and the tongues, is the neutral ground and highway of Europe. Its passes, from Hannibal's time to Napoleon, are memorable in the crises of history. For centuries since Roman times few who leave their own country fail to find themselves there. And, for at least two, if not three, centuries, European literature and poetry ring with its local memories.

The vast Alpine semicircle which stretches from Toulon to Trieste was no doubt impressive and wild in the primitive ages, but it was not then beautiful and enchanting. To Livy and Caesar, to Horace and Virgil, it meant difficulties, dangers, desolation. To St. Bernard, to Dante, to Chaucer, even to Milton, mountains were the Valley of the Shadow of Death. In the Middle Ages much of the Alpine region was a monotonous forest, a waste prairie. It was only as the valleys began to teem with abundance and culture, as homesteads were pushed up higher and higher towards the upper pastures, as paths were cut across the neck of the dividing ridges, as villages and bell-towers rose on bare mountain sides, as

vines, orchards, exotic plants, and southern trees were planted in the sheltered plains—it was only then that every traveller felt the supreme beauty of this land.

See a wooded gorge at the first glance as we catch it from the road ! Well ! it is a pine forest like any other. But stop and watch it closer. The whole valley teems with clearings, rich pastures, cattle byres, log cabins, chapelries, roads, bridges, belfries—each wrung by the toil of generations from a soil by nature barren and unkind. The paths mount up in long serpentine spirals from ledge to ledge, leaping across roaring torrents in dizzy arches and piercing precipices in corridors. A thousand feet above the lake on a shelving lawn there seems to stand a grey rock. We look more steadily, and lo ! it is a tiny church. We can hear its bell softly chiming. We can almost watch the peasant women gathering round it at Angelus ! 'Tis some *Maria zum Schnee*, some *Madonna del Sasso*. There on a stony plateau or scanty clearing, twice as high as our Snowdon, there is life, industry, home, devotion.

The traveller lives their life and sees their achievements. Even on each peak the cairn of rude blocks heaped up as a landmark and beacon testifies to the triumph of Man over all the obstacles of ungracious Nature. The poet in his most perverse mood never wrote a falser word than when he said in his mad way—‘Man marks the Earth with ruin.’ No ! —Man clothes the Earth with beauty, charm, and fruit. And nowhere on this planet is this seen in such completeness as when in this great Alpine world we find how Man has made bounteous and glorious a tract which at first was hopeless waste, and which still in some aspects seems to overwhelm the mind with awe and to paralyse the heart with horror.

When I first saw these mountains and valleys in my early Oxford days—can it really be fifty-six years ago and more ?—I was carried out of all good sense and self-control by the fascination of this new transcendent world. I deserted my friends and comrades, I raced about the crags and rattled down the snow glissades, tramped through the night, rose to

see the dawn in midsummer, and behaved like a youth in a state of delirium. I never saw a fresh peak but I thirsted to stand on it. I sought to be rid of guides, companions, engagements, impediments, to turn night into day, to turn travelling into a race, to slide down every *couloir*, and bathe in every glacier pool. I am less foolish now. And if I plod along with an old walking-stick in lieu of an axe, if I seldom go many hundred yards without halting to gaze and ponder and gaze again, I now love best the middle heights, pastures, and beaming woodlands, where the snow peaks form just the setting of the picture. 'Tis perhaps to-day the fortieth time that I look on this perennial scene of wonder and joy. And never have I seen it with such inward delight—delight that is shadowed only by this—that I cannot have you to share it with me.

LETTER III

Caux : October 5, 1907.

You ask me if I do not feel rather solitary three or four thousand feet above the sea, the snows beginning to whiten the peaks around, and I without a companion, much less a friend. Not a bit ! I have here perfect rest, an inexhaustible landscape over Lake, Lowland, and Alpine range, of which I watch the perpetual changes of light and tone from my terrace as I sit underneath its stone arcade. I have my own books as well as a library of four thousand volumes of romance ; I have every comfort that modern ingenuity provides ; I have a dozen varied walks through pastures, woods, and crags ; I have my own thoughts, fancies, and memories—and then, I have my daily letter from you—and my daily letter to you.

Oh, no ! since I cannot have you, I want no one else. I have a queer way with me, you know, some might call it an ungracious way, that to enjoy travelling most deeply, it is better to enjoy it alone. All my life, as you know, I have been used to travel alone—even in our married life. I was born and bred for foreign travel—which I began more than sixty years ago—and as distant travelling was always a fatigue to you, and of late years positively exhausting—from my youth upwards I have been used to travel alone. I have been without a companion in France, Germany, Holland, Italy, America, in Greece, Turkey, and in Egypt. Keen as I am to see everything, to go everywhere, to get down to the inside of all I see, its history, its ways, and its lessons, sadly fond of having my own way, of making my own plans, and keeping my own hours, I am not fit to be a travelling-companion with anyone ; and it would make you ill to keep alongside of me now for twenty-four hours. But above all in the Alps I desire to be alone. I cannot understand how one can

commune with the Alps freely and solemnly, if one is not alone. Solitary?—how can one feel solitary when night and day he stands face to face with these splendours, these poems, these immensities?

In my raw mountaineering days I used to go alone as far as it was possible. Wherever it was safe for a man who had been used to mountains ever since boyhood to walk by himself, I used generally to wander about without a guide and find my own way up and down. Where it would be rash to climb without skilled men—say on the Oberland or Valais snow passes—on the Wetterhorn, on Rosa, or the Grivola—what I liked best was to have a first-rate guide, or it might be two, and no friend or companion. I was then not responsible for any man's accident, nor was any man responsible for mine. With two first-rate men of high reputation from Grindelwald, Zermatt, or Chamounix, an active man in health can do anything in reason with entire safety—provided that he will never risk bad weather, unfamiliar feats, or

try 'to lower the record' in time or any other silly way.

I never cared how many hours the pass or peak took me. For me the longer the time the better and the happier. I never asked what 'Tompkins' time' had been. I never wanted to hear what Tompkins had to say. I never cared to ask what were Tompkins' feelings or thoughts, if he had any beyond what he might have to tell the Club. I had my own thoughts and feelings. They were enough—almost too much for me. And often in old days—for days and nights together—on snow fields and on *arêtes*, in holes in the rock watching the blazing stars at midnight, I never opened my lips to man, except as to the best *couloir* to choose, or the best nook to pass the night.

All that I sought was to be in the presence of these Eternal Hills, to listen to the thunder of the avalanches, the roar of the torrents far down at the bottom of the glacier, to watch the sunrise gild each peak in turn, or the planets and stars blaze in the pure ether at a height of

11,000 feet, to trace the circling overhead of an eagle, angrily resenting the foot of an intruder, to see the chamois bounding down the Aiguille Verte to drink, to descry *bouquetin* on Grivola, to fling a rock down a mighty frozen slope and hear its reverberations as it leapt from ledge to ledge, or to pitch a stone down a sheer precipice and note its increasing speed till it almost outstripped a cannon shot ; to sit triumphant on the crest of Rosa or of Mont Blanc, and see around us a thousand peaks and yet not one of equal height ; and, far beyond, down in the valleys, or over the Italian plain, to see village, town, city, church, lake and vineyard, and to feel that one was looking down on earth and man from above, as celestial beings might look down—to perceive how vast and tremendous is the Earth—how puny, how scattered like insects in a field is Man—and yet here am I above them all—able to survey them all—able to overcome the obstacles and the menaces of Nature—aye, for the brief hour, above Earth, above Man.

Of course that is all passed long years ago, and is now a far-off memory. But still I love to linger over an easy climb and prefer to take it quite alone in my own way and at my own pace. I have long seen that the supreme beauties of the Alps are seized best in the middle heights ; for choice, looking down across one of the larger lakes. I am satisfied for the most part to go as high up as the mountain ash will thrive, with an occasional look from one of the central points which can be reached without axes and ropes, and yet command a vast range of snow field, glacier, and peak. It is enough to recall the tramps of old days in the ice world, and the scaling some typical snow-pass, such as the finest of the Oberland, Bernina, or Valais. To have seen this, to have felt that indescribable elation, is a thing that can never be forgotten in a lifetime. It cannot be conceived by any imagination till it has been felt. But once felt, it is burnt into the memory. And the sight of the snow line again, even from thousands of feet below, will stir your true

Alpine man, as a bounding sea will stir an old salt.

Indeed, I come to this in my old age—that the Alps are best felt, tasted most truly, by those who keep mainly to the middle heights within the range of forest trees, who view them with ample leisure, lingering over them, meditating upon them alone, it may be, without the distractions of a pleasant companion. What need to talk at all? Who needs to know the, mayhap, incongruous things that flit through a companion's mind? Who can utter one's own thoughts at such a time? Who needs to force into articulate speech the shadowy fancies which then hover across the subconscious brain?

I remember how, in a glacier expedition on the Bernina, we, three Oxford friends, were roped on a snow slope, the guide in front hacking steps. A dear fellow, now no more, would keep talking about Jowett's *Plato*. 'Look here,' cried our man in front, 'if you don't stop that jaw, I'll have the rope untied, and leave you loose!' And talking of Plato,

when Socrates asks Sophocles in his ninetieth year if he still thinks of love, the sweet old poet says—‘No ! indeed, Socrates, I have long got rid of that *wild beast*.’ I too have long got rid of the wild beast of mere snow-trotting, record-cutting, climbing ‘greasy poles,’ and turning the sacred Mountains into a racing track. Your young athlete only sees one half of it, and he is often in too great haste to enjoy even that. Old men who have long ceased to be athletic at all can see both halves and enjoy both. I had almost said that the old enjoy it best. But I only do say that it needs a long experience of Alpine travel and of European travel to enter into all that the Alps can give us, can teach us, and inspire into us.

The travellers’ ways and habits are changed indeed in half a century, but the Alps are not changed. Nay, since they are so strangely opened now to the old, to women, and to children, it would be a churl’s part in a mountaineer to grudge the new facilities of travel. When I first knew Switzerland in 1851, one had to

travel by road from Schaffhausen to Zurich, from Basle to Lucerne or Berne, from Dijon to Geneva. Never whilst breath is in my body can I forget my first view of snow mountains in that year 1851.

We had driven through the Black Forest from Freiburg in Breisgau to Schaffhausen in rain and cloud. There, from the hill above the Falls, suddenly the sky cleared, and revealed the snowy Alps of Glarus and Uri. It was one of the turning points in my life, the beginning of that passion which has beset me now for fifty-six years, and I take a childish pleasure in thinking that this was also the first view of the Alps ever seen by John Ruskin. That same year I quitted Geneva by malleposte over the Col de la Faucille. We started soon after midnight and toiled slowly up the Jura, and soon after daybreak we were on the top of the pass. It was about to prove a long day of torrential rain ; but in the early dawn hosts of crimson and orange clouds hung like a bloody pall over the vast Alpine range which this point commands. Mont Blanc

stood out in a sort of gory majesty, like the poet's King Arthur in his last battle. Never have I seen before or since such a fierce and ensanguined sunrise. And again I recall Ruskin's delight in the view he had from the old coach-road of the Col de la Faucille—now alas ! since the age of railroads, unused and unknown.

In those days, fifty-six years ago, there were no railroads, funiculars, Métropole Hotels, or cabins on the snow-field. I have tramped out from Basle, and back into Basle from the Oberland, carrying my own knapsack, and billeted at the Hirsch or the Adler by the roadside. I have often and often walked over all the great Passes into Italy, underneath which we now rush in spiral Tunnels. With my flannel clothes in rags, I was once all but turned out of an Inn at Andermatt, being taken for an Italian smuggler. I have slept—or rather passed some hours of night—under a rock, or in a cave, in a cowshed with eighty belled beasts, in a big bed in a chalet which held two neat-herds, a guide, and an idiot boy,

and where holes in the floor showed hairy swine underneath us.

We saw more of the people in those days—in the Tyrol we often had a village dance to the sound of the zither—on the higher passes, if provisions ran out, we had to eat marmot ; and once I passed twenty hours with no other food but bowls of stiff cream, and once with nothing but a tin of honey and butter mixed. There were no Paris *menus*, polyglott *garçons*, American radiators and hot baths. The landlord and a couple of stout *mädchen* would serve a *table d'hôte* of seventy guests with calf's flesh and pancakes. And as to baths, I have heard of men standing up naked on the bare floor and pouring over themselves a can of water, in order to teach 'the natives' how to wash.

In my day, the only Inn at Zermatt was at Seiler's Chalet with eight or ten rooms. To cross the Aletsch Glaciers or the Gorner, or Théodule, or Lysjoch Glaciers, one had to pass a rough night in a log cabin, or in a wet hole. But we were perfectly healthy and perfectly happy. And though it gives me a pang to

find a 'Palace,' that is more like Hadrian's Villa at Tivoli than an Inn, 4000 feet above the sea, to find *mondaines* from Paris, and millionaires from Chicago hauled up to an Alp by Funiculars and rack-and-pinion Rails, though I hardly prefer marmot and black bread to a French cuisine, I am not in my old age about to grumble if opportunities are so hugely extended, and if now we veterans and tens of thousands of women and children can see with ease the sights which in our hot youth we enjoyed with so many a rub and tumble.

The Alps now—even the higher Alps—are thrown open to people of every age, nation, sex, class, or purse. And I am not the man to regret it. Cable rails are ugly, and Parisian *menus* and American hotels on mountain tops are absurd. But the whole world can now come, and come in ease and luxury. I might not be here myself, if I had to play the tramp as I used to do of old. Plain living and high climbing are only for hardy youth. We must put up with what we cannot prevent, whatever the shock to our feelings. The

Alps used to be the British Playground. They are now a German Kurhaus. Britain has indeed taken a back seat in the pit or the shilling gallery. It contributes still tennis, golf, five-o'clock tea, and the smoking-jacket—which garment plethoric bankers from Hamburg and nervous pork-packers from Chicago all feel it a solemn duty to wear at dinner.

The glory, charm, bracing air of the Alps are untouched. I have found here a nest where we will come and rest, if we live to see another year—a haven which combines the bloom of Italy and the panorama of the Mountains. There we will come and read again Voltaire's 'Letters,' Rousseau's whining, Gibbon's 'Memoir' and Byron's 'Diary' and 'Poems.' We will read all these, with Ruskin, and Manzoni, and Goethe. And then we shall feel again that none of them, nor all together, were able to tell all that the Alps rehearse by day and by night in their wondrous tale—a tale so ever new, so ever old. Goodnight. *À demain.*

LETTER IV

Ouchy : October 14, 1907

You ask me how much I find the Alps changed in the half-century that I have known them. Well, I find the country itself richer, brighter, more complete—of course the glorious views untouched even by all the arts and follies of man—but to the traveller, it is changed indeed. One would have now to go far afield, if one wanted the rough-and-tumble of our young days. Hundreds where there used to be ten, Germans and Russians where there used to be English, cable and rack railways where there used to be *chaises-à-porter*, and an ultra-New-York sumptuosity where there used to be plain living and 'high' chamois.

In the fifty-six years that I have known Switzerland I indeed find the country to have

made vast strides in all mechanical things and the appliances of modern civilisation. Basle, Zurich, Lausanne, and Geneva are great industrial cities ; in wealth, energy, beauty, and civic organisation, quite of the first rank for their size in Europe. Indeed, I hold Zurich, Basle, and Geneva to be the model cities of our age—the fine type of what cities will one day be in a regenerated age—the true type of civic organisation, having sites of rare beauty and convenience, spacious streets and avenues, noble public walks and gardens, perhaps everything short of grand antique buildings. Lucerne, Freiburg, Lausanne, Thun, Berne, and Lugano have fascinating remains, and many picturesque points of view. But however interesting as towns Lucerne, Berne, and Lausanne may be to the traveller and the historian, their geographical and local sites, the want of broad spaces and central communication, must ever prevent them from having the rank of great cities, such as Basle, Zurich, and Geneva are destined to be—and we may even say, now are.

Of them all, I hold modern Geneva to be the finest type of a rational city that Europe possesses. Its modest population of about 120,000 is as much as is needed for high civic life. Its wonderful site, astride the most beautiful rushing river in our continent ; its calm and spacious aspect at the mouth of a grand lake large enough to look like an inland sea, and yet not so broad as to cease to be a lake ; its superb view of the snow chain of Mont Blanc ; its beautiful gardens, bridges, and promenades ; its history of two thousand years ; its intellectual and spiritual memories of four centuries ; its record as the asylum of the oppressed ; its ingenious and studious people—all this makes Geneva the very model of a true city. A true city where, as in Athens, Florence, Venice, Antwerp, or Ghent, of old, men can live a wholesome civic life, not in huge amorphous caravanseries such as London, Paris, or Berlin—not in suffumigated barracks such as Manchester, or Lyons, or Glasgow—but in a beautiful, well-ordered, free, organic city.

I used to think that, if ever my unlucky books had to be burned by the common hangman, and that my native land became too hot to keep me in comfort, or I became too poor to live in it, I would settle myself for an easy close of my last years somewhere on Lake Lemman. Geneva and its environs possess almost every quality which man can ask as a peaceful and rational retreat. But the memory of that old Arch-Rabbi and his Sanhedrim, the sight of that monstrous Corinthian portico stuck on to the Romanesque Church of St. Pierre, and the leathery Swiss paintings in the Rath Museum were too much for me. It is a curious proof of the survival of Calvinistic prejudice that Geneva holds Rousseau in honour, but not Voltaire. Voltaire, who did ten times more honour to Geneva than Jean Jacques, has no island, no statue. The Museum has neither portrait nor bust of him.

No ! if I have to live abroad to get a quiet life or an economic home, I will find a nest somewhere near Lausanne. Nothing can ever make Lausanne a fine or typical city,

scattered up and down a heap of hills and glens—not a dozen hideous *Ponts*, nor suspension bridges, lifts, and funiculars. By the way, I should like to have seen the beginnings of the Cathedral in presence of Rudolph, one of the real great men of the grandest of all the modern centuries, or to have seen it before it was ruined by Calvinism or by the pedantry of modern restoration. But even now, it is a noble Church.

As I sit here writing from Ouchy, the port of Lausanne on the lake, I am inclined to hold that Europe can offer no more Elysian retreat, unless it be the neighbourhood of Genoa or of Florence. But here we are in Northern Europe, in what is practically Anglo-French civilisation and surroundings, in a climate akin to our own. Here Gibbon lived and wrote his matchless *History of the World* for a thousand years; here Voltaire had his *Montrion*; here Byron wrote his ‘*Chillon*’; here a crowd of men famous in politics, literature, and art, have studied and have worked.

Ouchy is transformed since their day,

even since I first saw it in 1851. Then 'twas a rustic hamlet with a few fishing boats on a beach. In our mountaineering days it was the Capua of the Club—a luxurious snare to the hardy iceman which he was loath to quit. But now Ouchy is the very Naples of the Alps. They have built out into the Lake a set of terraces and quays on either side of the new and enlarged Port, and have thus formed a promenade, nearly a mile long, laid out in rich parterres, groves, and rare specimens of shrubs and forest trees. With care the semi-tropical plants will thrive here, and the flowers of all kinds have an almost Italian luxuriance and splendour. From the broad and shady drive on this Chiaia of the North, there rises on the land side a series of parks, as green as any Alpine pasture and clothed with grand specimens of forest trees, such, as Ruskin truly says, as put to shame our somewhat tame and bourgeois oaks. I have never seen in the villas of Como and Maggiore more luscious flowers and shrubs, nor anywhere on the Mediterranean, or in Southern France, more splendid and luxuriant

cedars, chestnuts, acacias, deodaras, planes, tulip-trees, magnolias, araucarias, and sequoias.

The esplanade has been carried out with taste, skill, liberality, and science. The rare and exotic shrubs have their botanic labels, and a classical choragic monument, with its prize tripod on the roof, protects a set of meteorological instruments. The whole terrace is kept with a care and skill that no Italian town could afford. The climate is hardly less serene and propitious to horticulture than that of the Riviera. And with its spacious view over the largest of the Lakes of Western Europe, and its magnificent panorama of the Alps of Savoy and Switzerland, I take this new Terrace of Ouchy, from the Castle to the old Tower of Haldiman, to be quite the grandest and most delightful of any that I know in Europe.

'Tis Sunday afternoon, and I have been strolling round the higher villages between Lausanne and Vevey. What a picture it is of peace, prosperity, family life, and freedom ! The vintage is in full swing ; but this is a day of rest and relaxation. The parents are

sauntering about with their chubby brood ; the girls in their best are chatting and flirting ; the lads are at the butts ; the noisier young bloods shouting patriotic songs. Here is the one country of the Continent which has never known conscription—and yet, small as it is, is felt to be impregnable :—which for a hundred years, except for a trivial spurt of a few days, has never known war in any form—where the whole manhood are trained soldiers, and yet it has never felt the drain of military service. It is a land of strict democratic equality, where the class feuds of our age are found only in one or two great industrial cities. There is no part of Europe where material civilisation has been carried to a higher point, and with less friction between Capital and Labour.

One side of life, alas ! is wanting—is indeed ‘conspicuous by its absence,’ as a famous orator said. There is neither beauty, grace, nor charm about the Swiss as a race, nor any consciousness that this is a defect. It remains an obscure problem in anthropology, why a people, dwelling in the most beautiful land

in Europe, have so little of the beautiful, so low a standard of beauty. Strong, active, healthy, well grown, as are Swiss men and women, they have less personal favour than many races of far inferior physique. One may now and then see a pretty woman—but never a true beauty. The native architecture, dress, appliances, art, decorations, may be quaint and original, but they have no real grace. French Switzerland follows Paris and Lyons ; German Switzerland follows Munich and Berlin—and of both it is but a weak imitation. Cross the Alps or pass into the Tyrol, and all is changed. Churches, villages, houses, dress, women, children, every wayside sight, on the sunny side of the Alps, or East of the Rhine, are eminently picturesque and, in places, attain to rare beauty. I admire—I love—the Swiss. But why—oh ! why !—are their belongings so dull, their looks so uninteresting, their figures—well !—so prehistoric ?

At Geneva, which I have known since 1851, I took care to study the old Cathedral, the

Museum, with pictures and statues by native artists, as well as whatever of antique and historic value the town retains. St. Pierre's was once a noble Church of early Byzantine work. But now bigotry, ill-taste, vandalism in all its forms, have ruined it and vulgarised it age after age ever since the Reformation. Does all Europe contain such a monument of perverse insensibility—such a record of wanton desecration? The lumbering Corinthian portico is stuck on to an early Mediæval church, with a late Renaissance excrescence ;—*desinit in piscem mulier formosa superne.*

And then the pictures ! How stupid, how oleaginous, how conventional ! Views of the Alps, or lakes, or torrents, fit for an illustrated print, or a chocolate box. The most beautiful land in Europe cannot raise one artist to depict its beauties ! Smoky tones, mechanical or theatrical groupings, dull skies like an English November ! Now Geneva is half French, has often given France a lead in literature and in science, and is still in the very front rank of

French culture. But why is it in art so prosy, so banal, so gross? Rousseau and Pradier were born in Geneva—but they were as truly French as any of their time; they exerted no influence on their own fellow-citizens; and they have left not a trace of genius behind them in letters or in sculpture. Was it worth while to found and collect a national gallery of Art, only to show that intelligence, industry, culture, amidst scenes of surpassing beauty, will not suffice to breathe into one man out of millions the genius of true art?

I suppose it is the ungainly tone of Swiss *personnel* which enables us to endure the modernisation of the country in half a century. The quaint old wooden Inns with carved legends, deep balconies, huge eaves, and sign-boards of Tell or the Bear—these are there still in out-of-the-way villages, but for most of us they are swamped by vast caravanseries of the order of the Savoy and the Cecil on the Thames, or the Elysée Palace in Paris. Nowadays even in the Alps all the Inns must be

'Palaces.' The Alps are being assimilated to the Riviera, except that there are not yet so many motors, and no gambling hells to speak of. It is a droll transformation of the old Alpine Gasthaus into Parisian Palace life.

We Britons, a fast diminishing race of tourists, like an aboriginal people in a conquered country, have left some of our pet appliances ;—baths, sanitary systems, separate tables for meals, evening dress, no conversation with a stranger, the royal invention of the dinner-jacket. Far off in the 'fifties and 'sixties is the sociable *table-d'hôte*, with *Kalbsbraten* and *Mehlspeise*, the tourist suits of every national make, 'the fun of the fair,' and the gossip about excursions past or future !

America has supplied our material existence and palatial housing. Germany supplies its scientific organisation and its ecumenical acquirements. Britain has supplied the social *morgue* and ice-bound rules of Mayfair and the Country House :—and the nations, from Finland to Andalusia, from China to Peru, have to live the modern life and conform to the

prescribed ways. It is sad—but it is the twentieth century, and we have to bear it. But the Alps are there still—and there are places in them where the ancient peace and the old charm may yet be found by the true lover of Nature.

LETTER V

Lausanne : October 20, 1907

You ask me, my dear daughter, if I have not had any adventures in the mountains, and have no good stories to relate. No adventures at all!—not even such a rough day as you and I had last year when we walked over the old St. Gothard Pass down to Airolo in a blizzard through six inches of snow. I am not so silly as to risk my old bones in adventures of any kind. I never risked my young bones either ; but if you must have a few mountaineering yarns, I will see if I can recall some lively scenes in the snow.

When we went up Mont Blanc in 1864, I had a good lesson in the folly that is the cause of most so-called adventures. When we reached our sleeping quarters in the then

wretched hut of the *Grands Mulets*, we found two young men stretched on the floor, insensible, and apparently dying. They were two very young Americans who, without any experience or proper equipment, had started off to climb the mountain. They wore light summer clothing, Parisian patent-leather shoes, and straw hats. They had eaten so much fruit that it had brought on a choleraic attack, which they had treated with spirits. They were now in collapse, livid, cold, and unconscious—the guides in a helpless way pouring brandy down their throats. We stripped off their wet, icy things, got boiling water, hot flannels, and fomentations, and tried to restore circulation. For half an hour I rubbed the bare skin of the one who looked the worst. I was myself red and perspiring with the walk up and the friction, and was dripping with the liquid glycerine that I had poured over my face to save my skin from being scorched by the glare. Gradually my patient returned to life. The colour came back to his face and he slowly opened his eyes with a vacant stare,

for he was quite tipsy. Solemnly eyeing me, with a rich Yankee brogue he ejaculated—‘Wal! say—you ’ere an ugly feller!!’ ‘Never mind,’ I said, ‘I’ve saved your life!’ So we pulled him through, and four guides carried him down in a blanket:—and I heard that in a few days he returned to that Elysian city to which good Americans go—but he had nearly gone to a less Elysian abode.

On the same expedition we met a young English soldier who was hardly any wiser. Untrained, fleshy, and raw, he had made a heavy bet with brother officers that he would get to the top of Mont Blanc. If money and pluck could avail, he would. I believe he had four guides and four porters to himself, who in three whole days did haul him up to the top and down again. As we came down the afternoon of our second day, he was staggering up the Col du Dôme, with four guides dragging on the rope in front, and the four porters pushing him behind. He had thrown off his hat, gloves, and spectacles, and his bare head and neck swayed helplessly, as he raised his

feet step by step. He did get to the top after three days and two nights on the mountain ; but he was cruelly excoriated and nearly snow-blind. He had to keep for three weeks in a dark room to recover his eyesight. He won his bet ; but I doubt if it paid his expenses.

Even some good guides will do silly things in a moment of excitement. Peter Bohren was a fine fellow, if he could be kept from the bottle. In the year 1853, I think, my brother and I engaged him to take us over the Strahlek and round the Oberland passes. There were no inns at the glacier level in those days, much less 'huts' and 'cabins' like the *Concordia* and so forth. We had to pass the night in a byre or a hole in the rock ; and as my companion was given to walk in his sleep, he was tied by the wrist between two, lest in the dark he should roll over the precipice. We resolved to make the Lötchenlücke Pass, which I believe had not been previously tried. It was a long day from near the Märjelen Lake, in which we had bathed to the horror of our guides, round the Aletsch Firn down to Kippel. In

the magnificent plateau between the Jungfrau and the Aletschhorn we unroped, had a lively breakfast, followed by songs and a dance. Peter was waving an empty bottle and shouting, when he broke through the ice and disappeared up to his middle. We were in fact rollicking on the top of a huge crevasse forty feet wide and a hundred deep. It sobered Peter and drew out some strong language from us. We were all roped up and tramped on.

But Peter, wild and unsteady as he was, was a fellow of spirit and resource, as we found that day. When we reached the Löttschen-glacier Fall, we found it broken up and almost impassable. After toiling for hours amongst the *séracs*, we came to a huge lateral crevasse stretching across the entire ice-fall from rock to rock. Here was a dilemma. The sun was setting, and we had been already fourteen hours on the snow. The crevasse was a vast chasm between two precipitous rocks. Peter and his two men ran from side to side seeking a way through, like keen hounds at a fault. At last Peter discovered a most ingenious

escape. When the glacier had broken up—it was a hot year and late in the season—a long strip of the tumbling ice-fall had stuck to the rocky precipice on one side and reached some fifty feet from the upper lip of the crevasse to the lower lip. The heat of the rock had melted holes in the fragment inside, whilst many sharp points still held the mass suspended over the chasm. Peter went first :—and, one by one, very cautiously we crawled through the melted holes. Would the mass bear our weight, or would our struggles wrench it from the side where it hung? It held, and we all alighted at last on the lower side of the great chasm. Peter and his mates, Protestants as they were, hurried to offer thanks to the Madonna in the first chapel they reached. And the curé of Kippel, less gracious than the Madonna, could give us nothing but hard black bread and dried fish after our tramp of sixteen hours.

Passing back to Kandersteg, thence by the Tschingel Pass to Lauterbrunnen, we claimed to have ‘founded’ Mürren as a station. The

double Col from Kandersteg to Lauterbrunnen is a long day ; and in 1853 at Mürren there was neither inn, nor hut, nor so much as a glass of milk to be got in the two or three poor chalets there. At Lauterbrunnen, Interlaken, and Thun we filled the hotel registers with vehement praise of the views and air of Mürren and rebukes to the indolence of tourists who neglected so magnificent a station. The next year, if I remember, I found a small Gasthaus installed in the noble plateau which now boasts at least a dozen palatial hotels.

Another fine guide who had his moments of folly was the last of the famous Lochmatter brothers. He was a splendid mountaineer, better as chamois-hunter than as guide, as active as a kid and as strong as a bull. His reputation and strength led us to engage him at Zermatt, though he insisted on taking with him a nephew, a raw lad of eighteen years and as many stone weight, who had no experience on ice, and had not so much as an axe or even an alpenstock with a steel point. We had

a glorious day on the Rosa, with unclouded views of Lombardy, its rivers and lakes. Lochmatter, a notorious boaster, vowed he saw the sea beyond Venice. Next day Lochmatter proposed to take us down to Macugnaga by a new Weissthor Pass which he declared he had just discovered. After leaving the *Cima di Jazzi* we began to descend the ice-slopes. Lochmatter took the lead ; my companion was next ; I followed, and the lout was last,—of course all roped together. We had not gone far when the young porter fell on me, and his eighteen stone knocked me off my feet ; I fell on my companion ; and all three on Lochmatter. In an instant the four of us were whirling down the ice precipice. I saw the spire of Macugnaga church between my feet, and felt that a few minutes more would take me for ever into the quiet graveyard. Lochmatter's axe whizzed and rang as he struck out to get a hold in the ice :—and at last, with a crash and a strain, the four of us were pulled up together, panting. As fortune would have it, both axe and rope held firm. Soon after

this, Lochmatter gave up business as guide and ended as a portly innkeeper.

Accidents, as in this case, are invariably due to carelessness and folly. All the rules of ice-craft were there broken ; and good guides never break the rules if it can be helped. It does not do to take on amateurs or outsiders. Having a fine Chamounix man who had taken me up Mont Blanc, and then by the Glacier Passes to Zermatt, I had a fancy to try the beautiful pyramid of the Grivola, near Aosta, a sort of Matterhorn minor, which had beaten Stephen with Melchior and some other famous climbers. The Grivola was then the special preserve of King Victor Emmanuel, the haunt of the rare *bouquetin*, or *ibex*, a much nobler beast than the chamois. The king's keeper was said to be the only man who knew the way to the top, and he kept it as his perquisite and secret. I engaged him, and he did his work and took us up and down. But nothing would induce him to use the rope on a crevassed glacier, or give any help on a bad place. 'I will show you the way,' he said ;

‘but if you fall in, you shall not drag me ; and if I fall in, I don’t want to drag you !’ That was fair, and I had to admit it. But my Chamounix man was indignant. He had never heard of a guide disgracing himself like that. ‘I am not a guide,’ said the *garde-forêt*, ‘I am huntsman to his Majesty.’ And I am free to admit that on the crags of the Grivola, coated as they were that morning with a most treacherous *verglas*, the rope would have been worse than useless and only encourage misplaced confidence.

They were splendid fellows in those days, forty and fifty years back, and I feel sure they have left sons and grandsons as good. Couttet of Chamounix, Melchior Anderegg, Peter Anderegg, Baumann, Kaufmann, Biner, Perren—I mean those of the generation of the ’fifties and the ’sixties, for the names and the clans remain—were all good men, like in their qualities to any of our most experienced seamen. Many an expedition have I made with them, and I look back on those days and weeks we spent together as amongst the most

useful of my life. Health, Nature, and human character were pouring forth their gifts to the body and the soul. It is the noblest of all sports, the best athletic training in the world, the most vital refreshment of the spirit. They may try to turn Switzerland into another Riviera choked with motors and 'palaces.' They may seam its mountains with cable rails and toboggan runs. But the Alps are too large, too high, too noble to be ruined for those who love them, and who honestly seek to know their mystery and their power. May I live and keep strong enough to have a few more walks amongst them yet, my daughter ! How I wish I had you here now !

LETTER VI

Hôtel Byron : October 1907

SWITZERLAND used to be called 'The Playground of Europe.' There is not much of the playground about it now. It is over-civilised, over-dressed, over-fed, and its ways are imported from Pall Mall and the Rue de la Paix, Longchamps, and Hyde Park. Half a century ago I met an eminent London merchant in first-class hotels and trains, travelling in a ragged flannel jacket—his sole surviving suit. I have met a party of English students, sitting beside a wayside stream, in the costume of our first parents in Paradise, whilst their only shirts, which they had been washing in the river, were hung on trees to dry. In 1851 an old traveller, who remembered the Prince Regent and had been one of the first to enter Paris after Waterloo, recommended

a party of mountaineers 'To put dress-suits in their portmanteaus.' The shouts of laughter with which this advice was received would hardly be repeated to-day. The English laws of costume now have to be observed by the most lawless plutocrat from Illinois and the most pushful banker from Frankfort.

How we laughed in 1852 at Albert Smith's Lectures on Mont Blanc, about the tourist taking out his skates in order to skate on the *Mer de Glace*! There is plenty of skating in the Alps now: indeed, as a sport, skates and bob-sleighs have almost superseded ice-axes and ropes. Before the railways had opened Switzerland to the European public, strange indeed were the national types, and still stranger the costumes and equipments, of the various races. The German student in those days was much as we see him in Thackeray's Ballad. One broiling day I was pounding up the Wengern Alp at a double to catch up some friends whom I had missed. I fell in with some German students whose outward man might have served for muleteers or robbers

in 'Don Quixote.' In the intense heat, I had taken off my coat and wore only my knickers and a gay-coloured shirt. As I was panting up, we met a portly English prelate and his two daughters, each on a horse quietly descending—the ladies holding up parasols to keep off the sun. The younger (and the prettier) girl stared at me and broke into a laugh. 'Mary, do look !' she called out to her sister ; 'what creatures they are, to be sure !' The British tourist still thinks every other people as ignorant of English as he is of their language.

My red flannel shirt got me into a scrape on the Italian side in the days of the Austrian domination. About sunset I reached the Imperial frontier of one of the lakes, from the Swiss side, in a boat. There was talk at the time of Garibaldian insurrections ; and the arrival at night of an open boat was thought highly suspicious. We were arrested and taken by the police to a long examination of persons and luggage. My red shirt was soon discovered in a bag. I was immediately pronounced to be 'Garibaldi's Englishman,' sent

forward on a mission to rouse the valley. We were kept hours under the search. Every garment we had was turned inside out and the linings examined. Our guide-books, maps, and 'Bradshaw' were opened and turned over page by page for secret despatches. A dressing-case was ransacked to find stilettos or bombs. After hours of search the head officer of the station was sent for and at last pronounced 'Gar Nichts !' Thereupon the 'natives' in a crowd outside the custom-house and police-station shouted with delight, and with roars of 'Viva Vittorio Emanuele ! il nostro Re !' carried us off in triumph through the streets. We addressed the people from the balcony and tried in vain to convince them that we were not Garibaldini and had no mission. Three days after that the official who arrested us was stabbed in the street.

There were often some amusing scenes on the Lake of Lugano in the days when the Northern sides of that Lake were republican and Swiss, and the Southern or Eastern sides were Austrian and in a state of siege. An

Englishman in Lugano made a bet that he would get into the Imperial frontier without a passport of any kind—a thing in the 'fifties as difficult as to get into the Royal Yacht Squadron without strong backing. Having made careful plans, the wagerer waited till the one steamboat to Porlezza on the Austrian end had sailed and discharged all passengers. Some hours later he arrived alone in an open boat, well knowing that the official in charge of the *visas* had gone into the mountains to shoot. He was of course detained by the guard, making most tremendous outcry at his detention, and vowing that the British Ambassador at Vienna would interfere, and Lord Palmerston would make it an international question. Long after sunset, the passport official arrived on the scene and overwhelmed the tourist with apologies and explanations. All *pourparlers* being ended,—‘Show me the passport,’ said the contrite officer, ‘and I will not keep you another minute.’ ‘I have no passport,’ said the tourist; ‘but if you will excuse this irregularity

of mine, I will excuse yours ; and we will cry quits ! ’

The only occasions in which I have ever been in difficulties in the Alps were when I gave way to my incorrigible love of wandering about by myself. One afternoon, after a morning on the spurs of the Matterhorn, then inaccessible, I left my guide and took to roving about the lower end of the Gorner Glacier, and then began to climb up the rock on to the Riffelberg. I had got on all-fours many hundred feet up the side above the ice, when I perceived that the mossy bank up which I was crawling was itself quite loose on the glacier-polished rock underneath ; and in fact the ground on which I was extended had begun to slide down bodily. I dug fingers and toes into some clefts in the rock ; and for ten minutes or so hung in doubt whether to go up or down, both courses apparently hopeless. I tried hard to put my mind in a proper state for what I quite believed were to prove the last ten minutes of my life. But do what I would, I could think of nothing but the just verdict of ‘ served him right ’ that would be passed by all

sensible men when my corpse should be found on the ice. Having given myself this thorough dressing for my folly, I decided to crawl upwards with nails and claws stuck into any cranny of rock, letting the moss slide away below me. I was like a cat on its belly crawling up a brick wall ; and in half an hour I was safe on firm ground.

Even this did not cure me. Years afterwards, when I was old enough to know better, I was living at the Rieder Alp, and took a walk up to the Eggischhorn. I then descended straight down on to the Great Aletsch Glacier, which I knew of old, intending to make my way back to the Rieder Alp. I was alone, with nothing but a walking-stick ; it was late in September of a hot season, and the crevasses were unusually numerous and wide. I made way slowly, and at last about sunset was forced to quit the glacier and found myself at the bottom of the North-western side of the Bettmer Alp, which rose up between me and home. By the time I had reached the top of this Alp it was pitch-dark ; and my hotel

lay at least a thousand feet below me down a pretty steep cliff. The season was too late to lie down on the rock for the night, and I had been afoot fourteen hours ; yet it was bad work climbing down a broken cliff in the dark. But something had to be done. I shouted on the chance of a herdsman in the valley below hearing my voice. And then very slowly, step by step, and hour by hour, I crawled down like a blind man feeling his way with a stick. Cold, hungry, and weary as I was, I certainly had an unpleasant night, thinking each step in the dark would be my last, until I saw far down in the valley a lantern moving towards me. It was a party in search of me. And in the early hours of the next morning, at last I reached the inn, and over a jug of hot liquor I vowed that I would never be such a fool again.

In the intoxicating air of the Alps even elderly mammas do silly things. In my bachelor days I met a dear old lady with some charming daughters on the top of one of the higher stations. On Sunday morning, in the

absence of the clergyman, she insisted on my delivering them a sermon, with which she was much edified. Hearing that I was a Fellow of my college at Oxford, she confided in me that one of her daughters was inclined to the 'dangerous views of Dr. Jowett,' and she begged me to expound to her the sound Oxford theology. The young lady was an able and well-read woman, and we had an interesting afternoon together. I was not myself a disciple of Jowett's—in fact I had just written, or was just about to write, on 'Essays and Reviews' in the 'Westminster.' But our conversation that Sunday afternoon, as we strolled up to the Kulm, was one quite appropriate for the day and the place.

Mamma felt anxious about her youngest, known as 'Baby,' who was thought to be delicate and imprudent ; and for the afternoon climb to the mountain top she specially confided 'Baby' to the care of a very famous athlete who was of the party. He was a youth notorious for his foolhardy adventures, which had already caused some terrible accidents. In

fact the guides, one and all, refused to go with him and nicknamed him 'the mad English Herr.' To him, with many words of caution, 'Baby' was entrusted. We had not gone far when we were all enveloped in a dense mountain mist in which one could see nothing three yards away. We naturally separated into pairs, and soon entirely lost sight of the others. As I had seen the panorama from the Kulm at least twenty times before, I was quite content to be able to discuss Neo-Christianity with my thoughtful partner without interruption or company. Going up easily by the beaten track we reached the top, and thence looked down a precipice of a thousand feet on to the glacier below. The white cloud was boiling up from the gulf beneath and breaking on the precipice in foaming billows.

Through the dense mist voices seemed to come from below on the face of a precipice—one which might have made Christian Almer himself careful of his foothold. Presently we descried the 'mad Herr' dragging Baby up the cliff. 'Plant your left foot on this stone,

and give me your right hand, Baby ! ' he was saying. ' Now dig your fingers into this hole ! ' ' That crag will bear your weight ! '—and so on. At last they emerged out of the gloom, safe and sound, and all went well. We knew very well—but neither Baby nor her mamma ever did know—what a case of ' touch and go ' that Sunday walk had been to her delicate child.

Now when you go mountaineering again, my dear daughter, don't have anything to do with mad Herren, nor try any ' feats,' or do any silly thing. The Alps are too solemn, too lovely, too sacred to be profaned by boyish games and girlish pranks. The hordes of gross tourists who turn them into racecourses, rinks, and smart ' palaces,' are worse barbarians than the Vandals, Huns, and Goths of old. And I doubt if the new Matterhorn climb, the passes and peaks that have been ' discovered ' of late years, are so great improvements of the old ones we did in the 'fifties and the 'sixties ! I take an old man's privilege when I say to myself, with a sigh,—'*Où sont les neiges d'antan ?*' Ah ! *les neiges d'antan !* To my

memory still the grandest of all the Alpine summits is the view from the Rosa on a clear day, when, along with the two great snow chains, you see the Lombard plain, its rivers and lakes, spread out beneath you as in a map. I hold the Wetterhorn, with its great variety of views and obstacles, to be the most interesting peak I know, and the old Strahlek, Lötschenlücke, and Lysjoch to be as interesting passes as any. Mont Blanc, though monotonous as a climb and uninteresting as a panorama, will always remain a first-class expedition by reason of its extent, size, and prestige. I never at any time held with the 'greased pole school' of the Club. And now, after fifty-six years' experience of the Alps, I hold, with Rousseau, Byron, and Ruskin, that the highest and deepest charm they can give is found in their combination of glories, as often as not in their lakes, their wooded valleys, their upland pastures—nay, even in their villages and towns—with their long record of memorable things in literature, science, history, and art.

THE ALPS ONCE MORE

(A letter published by 'The Times' in 1906.)

Axenstein : Sept. 20, 1906

HERE, in Axenstein, in view of the historic cradle of Swiss liberty, and amidst some of the sublimest scenes in Europe, we have enjoyed the pleas you have made for the preservation of these wonderful works of Nature, and for the due use of them by foreign tourists. It is now exactly fifty-five years since I first saw this lake and these crags ; and in my old age I return to them and find them somewhat changed in the half-century—though the change is the work of man, no wise the work of Nature. Nature is as lovely, as sublime, as ever, and the railways, pensions and grand hotels, motors and circular trippers, are after all but scratches on the surface and flies upon the

granite rock. Will you allow me to jot down a few thoughts from the experience of more than half a century?

It is common observation that in many parts of Switzerland, and those some of the most interesting and beautiful, the English are now but seldom to be found. In my young days the English were about three-fourths of the travellers. To-day, in some of the most beautiful haunts, they are rather one-fifth, or even one-tenth. Of course other nations, especially the German and Italian, have gained in half a century enormous facilities of access, and also in wealth, energy, and ambition. And it is often said that Switzerland is exhausted, *connu*, hackneyed to Englishmen. But this is not the truth, or the whole truth. It cannot be ; for if most English men and women of leisure and means at middle age have already visited the great centres of the Alps, the younger generation has not had time or opportunity yet to do so, and the vast increase of facilities for tours must have tapped an area of myriads of new tourists. At Zürich, on

the Vierwaldstättersee, we English are to-day a weak minority, a *quantité négligeable*; the polyglot notices in trains, stations, and hotels are to-day in German, French, and Italian—but English has dropped out; for we are *rari nantes in gurgite vasto*. Why is this? I think I see an answer.

These Alpine countries, with their incalculable beauties and varieties, cannot be exhausted, *connu*, hackneyed to the younger generation of Englishmen. No, alas! we are the slaves of convention, fashion, and social law. The Alps may be *connu* to the middle-aged *censores morum*, who dictate the social law to the public, but they are not *connu* to the young, and they cannot be. These lads and girls are afraid of doing something that is not 'the correct thing'; they have to wear the collars their Bond-street tradesmen assure them are now worn by the 'right people'; and so they are ashamed of the vulgarity of being seen at Zürich, Lucerne, or St. Gallen—'which everyone has done.' And so they deprive themselves of one of the most un-

forgettable experiences this earth can still afford to man, lest their set at home should hold them cheap in not trying something new—the Fjords of Norway, the Carpathians, or the coast of Morocco. They aspire to be abreast of the smart world, and they lose the noblest sights in all Nature ; suffering, as do Chinese women with their feet, in order to submit to the law social.

Again, another cause has led to the neglect of the true beauties of the Alps. We have all gone crazy over the ice-field mania. With our worship of athletics in every form, we are led to believe that no one in Switzerland who respects himself, or indeed herself, at least under the age of forty, ought to be seen far from the snow and without an ice-axe. As an old Alpine Club man myself, who has done his Monte Rosa, Wetterhorn, Mont Blanc, Grivola, and all the famous passes of the Oberland and the Valais, I am not likely to undervalue the transcendent charm of a snow-peak, the physical and moral intoxication of a great glacier field. There is no such air, no

such sport, no such transfiguration open to man on this earth. For thirty years I have drunk it all in to my very soul. And at seventy-five, I wish I dare try it again without imprudence.

But the superstition that glaciers and snow-peaks are the only things in the Alps worth coming to see is a silly conceit, fomented by some men from the Universities, public schools, and athletic clubs. They turn the eternal mountains, vocal with all the most majestic and stirring appeals to the human spirit, into a mere track whereon muscular lads and mannish maidens can exhibit their prowess. Such an one will spend a month in Switzerland and go home as blind and unconscious of its historic relics and its lovely landscapes as a St. Bernard dog or a Chamounix mule. College tutors and lower school masters are the priests of this false worship. Some Professor Sandow, some Reverend Burgess, teachers of youth, impart the gospel of muscle—not of mind—by precept and example. Switzerland might be made one

of the most instructive schools of history, one of the most exquisite schools of every sense of beauty, one of the most pathetic schools of spiritual wonder—and they make it a mere playground, a racecourse, a field for ‘records’ of muscular feats which are only in place in a hippodrome.

I am the last man to deny the supreme delight of a great day on the snow, and I owe my health to having sought it year by year for twenty years and more. But one cannot be, and ought not to be, for ever on the snow. And for sheer beauty and multiplicity of changing impression in colour, vegetation, composition of landscape scenery, the middle heights, before we quite leave the juicy pastures and forest foliage of the Alps (which mean the pasturages), are the scenes of the most tranquil and continuous delight. Even in my own perfervid *gletscher* days, I wrote a piece to this effect, and found alas! that it was quoted as a puff of a new hotel a few hundred feet above the lake. However sublime are the snow-fields of the Oberland

and the Valais, the true lover of Alpine glories will not spend his entire holiday in rushing from pass to pass and from peak to peak in order to beat 'Tompkins' time or establish a new 'record.' To-day the Boat Race excites the English-speaking people here more than all the exquisite solitudes of the Bay of Uri, or the emerald flashes of light from the historic plateau of Rütli.

How poor a mind it is that despises the quaint antiquities of the old Swiss towns of the lower country, and whirls past them in a sleeping-car by night! Your *gleitscher* man would be sore ashamed to waste two hours in a great historic city such as Zürich. It has the original sin of being a lowland town, and so is to be passed in the dark, if possible, by your modern Alpinist. Seventy years ago, as we may see in the National Gallery cellars, Turner found in Zürich one of the most lovely subjects of his brush. It is no longer a romantic old relic of the Middle Ages, but it is one of the best organised and most perfectly equipped of European cities. Its magnificent

situation and rare natural opportunities have been used to the full by its energetic citizens. If one is interested in municipal organisation, let him study the institutions and edility of Zürich—its boulevards, quays, electric tram-lines, its water-supply, its public gardens, its lighting, its railways, and its post-office. Zürich is now a model modern city, in size, in construction, and arrangement the ideal of what a city should be to live in and to work in.

But I wish especially to call attention to its new national museum of local antiquities. It is barely ten years old ; but as a monumental history of Switzerland for five thousand years it is far the most complete collection in Europe. Neither London nor Paris, nor Berlin, nor Vienna, with all their splendid collections, can show anything at all equal in historic continuity for a single country as Swiss patriotism has done at Zürich. Its fifty rooms record the evolution of the national life from the age of the lake dwellings to our own day. And the value of such a systematic collection of national monuments, industry, and art can hardly be

overrated. The historian and the artist might spend weeks of study in mastering its varied contents. I had the good fortune to be taken over it by Dr. H. Angst, our British Consul, the spirited founder of the museum and one of the first authorities for local archæology in Europe. How many of our gymnasts and trippers have ever seen this thoroughly ? And why cannot Englishmen produce a similar record of their national life ? Have we interest in nothing better than games ?

SIR LESLIE STEPHEN

*(From the article on Sir Leslie Stephen in the
'Cornhill Magazine,' April 1904.)*

OF all Stephen's lighter pieces, those on Alpine climbing are to me the most characteristic and the most fascinating, if only for the reason that I was also a member of the Alpine Club, accompanied him in some of his climbs, and knew some of his favourite haunts, guides, and companions. I remember how he convulsed the Club and enraged the scientific zealots at a dinner by giving a mock-heroic account of an ascent of the Gabel-horn; how on the top, after a difficult and icy day, they proceeded to 'take scientific observations'; how 'they found' the temperature (by their fingers, for the thermometer was broken) to be 175° below zero; how, such was the altitude,

that the mercury in the barometer had quite sunk out of sight—possibly owing to the porter having turned it upside down ; how they tried to measure the ozone in the air—‘but if there *were* any ozone that afternoon on that *arête*, ozone must be even a greater fool than I take it to be.’ The men of science quitted the Club.

All Stephen’s Alpine pieces are delightful, full of his ‘saving common-sense,’ his hatred of superlatives and ecstasies, with his sound advice that the best amateur is inferior to an average peasant, with his deep passion for Nature, and his hearty sympathy with the Swiss guide at his best. Of all these pieces I most enjoy ‘Sunset on Mont Blanc,’ published in ‘The Cornhill,’ October 1873. Only practised climbers can understand the difficulties of watching the sun set in August from the actual summit of Mont Blanc, and then returning in the dark—difficulties which Stephen neither conceals nor exaggerates. But the piece has a depth of thought, a solemnity, even a poetry, which is too rare in his critical pieces.

How fine is this opening !

‘Does not science teach us more and more emphatically that nothing which is natural can be alien to us who are part of Nature? Where does Mont Blanc end, and where do I begin? That is a question which no metaphysician has hitherto succeeded in answering. But at least the connection is close and intimate. He is a part of the great machinery in which my physical frame is inextricably involved, and not the less interesting because a part which I am unable to subdue to my purposes. The whole universe, from the stars and the planets, to the mountains and the insects which creep about their roots, is but a network of forces, eternally acting and reacting upon each other. The mind of man is a musical instrument, upon which all external objects are beating out infinitely complex harmonies and discords. Too often, indeed, it becomes a mere barrel organ, mechanically repeating the tunes which have once been impressed upon it. But in proportion as it is more vigorous or delicate, it should retain its sensibility to all the impulses which

may be conveyed to it from the most distant sources. And certainly a healthy organisation should not be deaf to those more solemn and melancholy voices which speak through the wildest aspects of Nature.'

The whole piece is full of a delightful humour, with American touches that our men rarely attempt. He loves Mont Blanc; he personifies it; he sympathises with it, as one might with a favourite horse, or dog, or ship of one's own, a companion and trusty friend. 'With all his faults and weaknesses,' he says, Mont Blanc still deserves to reign supreme. It is true he has killed more mountaineers than all the rest of the Alps together. 'But we should hardly estimate the majesty of men or mountains by the *length of their butcher's bill*'—as if Mont Blanc were a Napoleon or a Frederick the Great. It is true that your modern climber calls the mountain stale and hackneyed—'an easy day for a good girl'—he would say; and its snow-slopes are uninteresting and conventional in form. But Stephen says, and says most truly, 'No

Alpine summit is comparable in sublimity and beauty.'

And then he goes on to describe the scene from the summit of the mountain, the moral and intellectual sense of rising, as it were, above earth and humanity; and he describes the emotion in ways that, so far as the idea goes, Byron, Shelley, and Wordsworth could not better. He certainly does not exaggerate the rapture of the moment, as I can testify myself. It happens that I once stood on the summit of Mont Blanc with Stephen on one of his many ascents. I was not of his party, but we went up on the same day, and were together at the top for the best part of an hour. I recall a little incident which illustrates his rare patience, kindness, and good temper. He took with him the famous Oberland guides, Melchior and Jacob Anderegg. A young novice, with no experience or stamina, had implored Stephen to let him join the party. The snow on the Grand Plateau was soft, and we sank deep at each step—my companion lost his great toe by frost bite—and the novice repeatedly sank

down exhausted, asking for brandy. Time after time Stephen halted at his entreaties and let him recover his wind. At last he could not rise, but lay back imploring Stephen not to abandon him, but to give him one more dram. 'Just one sip, Melchior,' said Stephen to the guide with the flask. The poor lad snatched the flask, clutched it, and drained it before Melchior could stop him. He then rolled back quite tipsy, protesting that he was all right, and 'would not go home till morning,' as it was 'a way they had in the army to drive dull care away !' etc. etc.

For some minutes the venerable precipices of the monarch of mountains re-echoed with our laughter and the snatches of drinking songs, Leslie looking on with pity, good nature, and perplexity in every line of his face. He had lost an hour by the lad's folly, and also his second man ; for, at last, with a grim shrug, he said : 'It's no use waiting here ; Jacob, carry him back !' It was to be Jacob's first ascent of Mont Blanc, but he disconsolately shouldered the poor youth who was spoiling

the day's sport, and dragged him slowly down to Chamounix. I believe Stephen felt for the disappointment to poor Jacob, and also to the heedless novice, as if it had been his own. It was, indeed, a liberal education to a young Alpine climber to spend a few days with Leslie Stephen and his Oberlanders in the crags and the snow-fields which he loved, as if they were his native home—as if they were the Delectable Mountains where the Pilgrim might at last find blessedness and rest.

The Alps were to Stephen the elixir of life, a revelation, a religion. And we may rank his enthusiasm for Nature, and his familiarity with grand scenery as amongst the best influences of our time in teaching us the moral and spiritual force which Nature can impress on the soul of man. Men and women, who are deaf to Byron and Wordsworth, Keats and Shelley—ignorant even of Ruskin and of Symonds—have been led up by Stephen to a pure love of walking in the midst of beautiful landscapes, and have been drawn off from tedious jabber about the beasts they have

killed. When Leslie had hung up the ice-axe that had won so many virgin peaks, he organised the pedestrian company of the 'Tramps,' who would foot it on Sundays over so many a Surrey heath and Sussex down. It was Nature in all its infinite aspects that Stephen loved, not athletic feats, or 'record' time, not the dangerous glaciers and icy crags for any reason but their beauty, not what Ruskin called 'climbing a greasy pole.' To Stephen a climb or a walk meant always the glory of the Earth, the light and air of Heaven, health, and good fellowship. I think he loved the Hindhead, the Blackdown, the New Forest, and the Cornish Coast almost as much as the Alps. I can recall his enjoyment of the Hog's Back, near which I then lived, and how he grumbled when we gave his pack of 'Tramps' roast beef and apple tart in the middle of their eight-hour course, for he said that bread and cheese and ale-house beer was their regulation ration, and 'Tramps' should not be pampered.

THE ITALIAN INUNDATIONS
OF 1868

(*A letter to 'The Times.'*)

Genoa : October 4, 1868.

As the information of an eye-witness may interest and be of some service to many of your readers, you may possibly find space for the following narrative of one of those who were the last to cross the Alps by the route of the St. Gothard during the late floods. Over the greater part of North Italy rain had fallen almost without intermission for twenty or thirty days, though not in the Alpine district so as to cause any serious catastrophe ; but on the night of Sunday, September 27, a terrific storm broke upon the southern slopes of the Alps, producing in a few hours vast torrents and avalanches, under which roads, houses, and villages were swept away, and large tracts of fertile country

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were sunk in mud and water. The storm of the 27th, however, proved to be only the signal of disasters to come. For a week since, night and day, there has been but one continuous storm and cataract of rain, the results of which are not yet known, but which has already covered the whole valley of the Po with a series of inundations.

On the morning of the 29th we left Lucerne to cross the St. Gothard road in splendid weather and in total ignorance of the catastrophe of the 27th. This had been kept from us by the aid of that system by which every accident or breakdown on these roads is industriously concealed. As we approached the summit of the pass, indistinct rumours of some calamity on the southern side began to reach us ; the various postmasters along the route, however, maintained a dogged silence, and refused to give the travellers information, counsel, or assistance. From the summit downwards we continued over heavy roads and in perpetual torrents, until at nightfall we were brought up at Faïdo with the news that the

road ceased to be practicable. The petty miseries endured by numerous travellers who had been unsuspectingly crowded down into this place, their struggles for shelter and supper in a poor village that had itself been flooded the day before and was still in serious risk, are trifles in the midst of this widespread ruin. The storm of the 27th had filled Faido with water, destroying property and flooding the stables of the draught horses and cattle. Thence downwards for some twenty miles, we were told, the road was totally broken up, and could only be passed on foot. Accordingly, on the following morning a large party of travellers started in storms of rain to walk down the pass, their luggage being carried by a long train of porters, and with very little notion of what was before them. Immediately after leaving Faido the signs of destruction began. The road had been torn up at intervals by torrents descending from the precipices above, and swept by avalanches of earth, stone, and timber. As we passed on, the destruction became worse. Orchards, woods,

vineyards, and chalets were seen to have been hurled in a mass across the valley, which they covered with ruins, and for long tracts not only had every trace of road disappeared, but every trace of cultivation itself; so that what used to be once a rich country, teeming with produce, and traversed by a massive causeway, had returned to its primitive state of torrent bed and waste of rock. Here and there a chestnut or walnut tree, cut short off by the root, lay across the track; here and there it was a torrent of mud and sand, or it might be a mass of rock from above, more than 20 feet in diameter. At Giornico a huge avalanche of earth, mud, and timber had swept away one end of the village, buried a part of it and the road 12 or 15 feet deep, and flooded the lower stories of the houses which still stood. Here one of the travellers who had recently recovered from illness was unable to proceed, and a portion of the party was therefore forced to halt for the night. During the whole of that night the rain continued with fury, and on the following day when the march was resumed

the temporary bridges were carried away, the torrents were again swelling every hour, and a return of the floods of the 27th became imminent. From Giornico onwards the scene became more terrible. The slopes of the valley had been at close intervals torn by avalanches from above, before which road, homestead, and vineyard, everything created by man's hand, had been cut down ; while the alluvial plain in the midst, for miles together, was buried in the sand and rock, and had ceased to be cultivable soil. Now and then in the midst of this desolation, as if just to remind one of the richness of beauty the country once had, a vineyard stood untouched, with the vine tendrils clinging to their supports, and its trellises still resting on the stone piers ; or, it might be a roadside fresco of the Madonna (her heart pierced with the seven swords) remained fresh and bright in the ruins. At Bodio the disaster has been greatest. The whole village was swept by a torrent of mud and stone, which left scarcely a house standing and buried about twenty persons in the ruins.

The destruction was almost instantaneous. The torrent which descends from the mountain above had burst its channel, and partially flooded the houses, when about midnight on the 27th a crash high up the precipices was heard, and soon a stream of mud and rock swept over the village, and almost buried it out of sight. The scene there when we reached it—the tops of the houses only visible; the furniture, utensils, and stores tossed wildly about the ruins; the bewildered peasants groping for the dead bodies, or articles of value; some working to throw up a temporary shelter and supply their immediate needs; some standing helplessly over the fragments of their homes in stupefaction; the poor curé surrounded by groups of parishioners asking for his aid, he himself almost exhausted with suffering and fatigue—was one more terrible than any I have ever before experienced. But the increase of the storm made delay impossible. The channels which had been scooped by the torrents of the 27th were filling afresh, and threatened to cut off all passage forwards or

backwards. The rest of the walk was made through wild storms of rain, varied with bursts of a truly tropical downpour, by scrambling over the ruins of road, plantation, or village, or wading through torrents of rather serious dimensions. As we reached Biasca, where the Blenio joins the Ticino, further disasters appeared. The Blenio was rising more violently even than the Ticino, and threatened to cut the communication up the main valley, which, a few hours after we forded it, did actually occur. A party of engineers we met there were shaking their heads and throwing up their hands in despair; the bells from the church towers were tolling, as we were solemnly assured, to drive away the storm; the villages of this lateral valley had been swept by avalanches, and in all of them property and cattle and in some many lives had been lost. The precipices on either side of the valley were streaming with countless and almost continuous waterfalls, and we met on all sides families flying to secure refuges, wretched, half-clothed men and women dragging along

their shrieking children, and tottering under the burden of such household goods as could be snatched up. Ruin in some form or other met the eye almost down to Bellinzona. In a word, the whole valley of the Ticino, which every tourist will remember as a scene of continual beauty and richness, has been desolated ; for twenty or thirty miles its entire sources of industry have been destroyed, and great tracts of it have been changed from the most fertile soil into a mere desert of sand and rock.

It is melancholy to reflect that not even the yearly repetition of these frightful calamities appears to force upon these peasants or their rulers the need of measures of protection, or even of mutual assurance, on a grand scale and under the national authority. Competent engineers, armed with public powers, could certainly reduce the ruin caused by these storms to a tenth of their present extent ; and when they occur a vigorous Administration could do much to repair their ravages. But, although it must be said that this simple peasantry, in a disaster of this kind, showed in

many cases fine qualities of patience and pluck, their profound ignorance, their indifference to their danger, the total want of social organisation, the utter absence of mind or will to lead and discipline them were most pitiable. In villages still threatened with destruction, such as a few resolute men, well led, might avert by the labour of a day, the peasants might be seen singly and aimlessly prowling amid the ruins and scooping out the mud from their windows. The ruin which they had suffered, and with which they were threatened still, was as complete as when the foot of a man or a beast crushes through an ant-hill ; and all these poor people could do was to grope about the remains of their homes, as aimlessly and not so actively as the insects,—wholly without human cohesion or direction, or with none but that of a poor priest wringing his hands, and ordering the church bells to toll for fine weather.

There is however, I think, some kind of relation in which these poor people stand to those who are wont to cross and are about to

cross their country ; and upon travellers at least they should have some claim for help. For all the wretched arts of the creatures who are bred by our luxuries, and who fatten on our extravagance, they are in no sense responsible. Nor can any man of common heart feel altogether easy when he finds his summer tour is unwittingly taking him amid a scene of death and ruin such as this, or be wholly satisfied with the care which he takes for his comforts in the midst of sufferings so shocking. To be wet, hungry, and sleepless for a few days is an amusement to those who like adventure, and only an annoyance to grumble over at most. But that which has come upon these people is everything which is known in human life of evil. They are now without homes, clothes, food, or shelter. Their cattle, their stock, their buildings, their plantations, the very soil which they cultivated are gone. And if those who so often pass among them as travellers can do almost nothing to aid them to recover their condition, they may do something

by money to protect them from immediate suffering.

Unhappily, what was happening in the valley of the Ticino was only a specimen of what was befalling many a valley of the Alps. At Bellinzona rumours, more or less distinct, were rife of similar disasters in all parts of the range. What appears to be certain is this—the St. Gothard road, as a great highway, is totally broken up on its southern side and will not be completely restored for months. The Bernardino and the Splügen are also broken, and great bridges destroyed. The Simplon road is for many leagues fathoms deep in water. The director of the post at Bellinzona appeared to be acting with vigour. On Monday, the 28th, he telegraphed notice of the calamity to Berne and Lucerne, and himself went up to the scene of disaster. But the conduct of the office at Lucerne, which, after this news, despatched on Tuesday, the 29th, three diligences full of travellers, and actually took their money to be conveyed to Bellinzona, concealing from them the accident which

had made all transit impossible, was simply shameful and will be followed up in the proper quarter by those who were thus thrown into this scene of suffering and danger without warning. The system by which all accidents on Alpine roads are buried in silence is one of the worst. A few days previously a diligence on the St. Gothard road had been precipitated over the cliff by careless driving, and some eight or ten passengers more or less injured ; but all accounts of it were studiously kept from the ears of travellers. The fact is that a regular confederation of innkeepers succeed in covering up their own shortcomings by a concerted silence, and seriously damage the credit of the postal administration, which is a branch of the Federal Government.

On reaching Bellinzona it was found that all means of recrossing the Alps were cut off ; the storm was still increasing, and the rivers everywhere swelling, so that nothing remained but to press on southwards. We were assured that it was possible to reach Magadino on the Lago Maggiore, and the diligence with the

mail was actually started. Before reaching Magadino, however, the plains were seen to be for miles under water, and at length the road was itself submerged. Here, with no small difficulty and at some risk, boats were procured, and in the midst of a furious storm of wind, rain, and lightning the village of Magadino was reached, half sunk in the flood. The pier and all the offices at the wharf were scarcely visible, and the lake appeared to stretch right across the valley almost up to Bellinzona. In the inn at Magadino, the lower stories of which were under water, the travellers found some shelter, until towards evening the steamboat proceeded on her voyage down the Lago Maggiore. As each town on the lake was passed it was seen that it was half sunk in the water. Locarno, Cannobbio, and Luino showed only the upper stories above the waves ; the road was itself submerged ; villas, churches, and towns stood in the midst of the lake. At Intra and Pallanza the greatest injury occurred. There the streets and houses were covered by 20 feet of

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water, and as they were exposed to the gale from the south, and the bay was choked with fragments of wood, several houses had been beaten down altogether, and many lives lost. On reaching the bay where the Tosa falls into the lake it was seen that the whole Simplon road from Arona to Ornavasco was completely under water, and, indeed, the lower valley of the Tosa, like that of the Ticino, was a simple arm of the lake. The great hotels and the villas with which this part of the lake is bordered were submerged to their first and even second stories, the postal and telegraphic communication was cut off, the railway station at Arona was almost covered, and the granite posts for the electric wires just showed their tops above the water. Every town was more or less covered, and the inhabitants were hastening in boats to places of safety, and removing parts of their furniture and goods by ladders from the upper windows. The Ticino was unable to carry off the pressure of waters, and had flooded its whole valley for leagues down the Lombard plain. The Lago

Maggiore, which had risen about 20 feet, was still rising at the rate of 4 feet or 5 feet in a few hours, and there was every prospect of a still greater rise. Nothing of the kind has been known in the memory of man, and the only tradition of such a flood appears to date from a hundred and sixty years ago. For a week, and in some places for weeks, the rain never ceased for a single hour, day or night, and was varied only by thunderstorms and torrents, which were almost waterspouts. At midnight on the 2nd the lightning was so vivid and continuous that for a space it seemed a sort of spasmodic daytime, broken only by occasional flashes of night.

It appears that the bridges over the Ticino, the Sesia, the Adda, and the Po have given way in many places ; that the ordinary communication between the cities of North Italy is interrupted, and the lakes and the rivers draining the watershed of the Western and Central Alps have formed wide and continuous inundations. What may prove hereafter to be the extent of the ruin it is as yet impossible

to foresee. A storm upon one of the lakes at this time might bring down any of these towns in a night. For the moment it appears that of the carriage roads over the Alps from the Tenda to the Stelvio the Mont Cenis alone is practicable, that in the whole southern watershed of the Alps the country is flooded, and the roads destroyed, and that the ordinary communication between the cities of North Italy is broken in twenty different places.

MOUNTAINEERING

(*An article in the 'Westminster Review,'*
October 1864.)

THERE are few people nowadays who have ever left England at all that have not seen something of the Alps, and few who have not felt something of the mountain fever in their veins. As a natural result, we have been bored to death with every form of Alpine narrative—serious, comic, scientific, poetical, semi-pseudo-scientifico-poetico-personal. Men (to say nothing of women) have come back from the mountains gushing over with their adventures as children from a fair, and have prosed about their hairbreadth escapes or the contents of their carpet-bags with odious earnestness. All this is very silly ; but a far sillier affectation is that of the very refined

people who have come to the conclusion that the Alps—the pathless, infinite Alps—are as good as *hackneyed*. No doubt the frisky impertinences of a few braggart scramblers are hard to bear ; and the boisterous glee with which they recount their deeds of daring recalls the dreary fun of the prize-ring. But all this is no excuse for the rank profanity of those who make light of the noble art of mountaineering in itself. We believe that so far from too much having been said about it, its real title to honour has never been recognised—*caret quia vate sacro*. The Alps will be worn out only when the ocean and the firmament are stale, flat, and unprofitable ; and Alpine climbing may be reckoned the folly of boys, only when the sap is withering up in men, and the fibres of their natures are growing coarse. It is rather our belief that of all the modes in which men may refresh themselves from work, this is the worthiest, most reasonable, most adapted to our times. Love for the mountains is yet but in its egg ; and mountain walking has yet to take rank as the noblest,

the happiest, and the most popular of all our national pursuits.

Let us be just. There are many things good, even though but one thing is best. Dull of spirit, or but weak of stomach, is he who does not know the thrill which stirs all English blood upon the sea—who does not love it in its every mood, its gayest and its wildest—who is blind to the curves of prow and sail—who is deaf to the thundering charge of waters, and the ripple round the trenchant keel—who does not rejoice in all sea sights and sounds, the answered cheer, the quaint, quiet speech of the old salt—who has not glowed with the true fellowship of the deep. All manners and ways in which men move upon the waters are good and not to be despised : the very thud of the drenched fisherman's bow—the fierce pulsation of contending oars—the plunge into the still pool—the wreathed circles of the skate—all are good to fill the mind and nerve again the heart.

Yet though he were a very degenerate Briton who could gainsay the glories of the

ocean, in the Alps men may find these and more. In them earth, air, and water all join to give fresh mystery and beauty. The Alpine solitudes are more lonely and terrible than even those of the sea, the shapes and forms of things stupendous beyond all comparison, the loveliness more bewitching and multiform, the awfulness yet more deep. Billows of ice yet wilder than those of any tempest-driven sea dash themselves to fragments on Alpine peaks loftier tenfold than those of any coast ; and from an Alpine summit may be watched skies yet more golden, vaulting a far more various horizon.

May it also be long before the pride of our horse-taming race is forgotten, and Englishmen cease to love every pace of the noble brute ; the throb of the gallop, the bounding leap, the stately tread, and all the proud, delicate ways, the fire, the grace, the trust and patience of the first of the animals. Nay, but all rational delight in the horse that comes of honourable using of his gifts, is a right and gallant thing, very cheering to the healthy spirit, and very

bracing to the well-grained muscle. *Sunt quos curriculo*—and he must be a pedant that grudged men their delight in the horse and in every sort of skill which he can call out. Be it however remembered, that the practice of climbing mountains breeds a still keener use of hand and eye ; pursuit still fiercer, resolves yet readier, and the higher concert of man with man. Can any man seriously compare the chase of a poor vermin-fox with the zest of the attack on some untrodden pass, or the rapture of the race with that of conquering a new mountain-top ? No gallop warms the blood like the whirl down a slope of snow ; and no turf gives out a ring so merrily as the crunching of crisp glacier ice. But, were all those things equal, in all the higher elements, in all the moral features of a pastime, Alpine climbing as far surpasses horsemanship in all its forms as the mystery of the Alpine solitudes does that of our English downs, as much as trust in a tried comrade is better than our finest sympathy with the brute.

There comes then many an old English sport not to be despised by any one who values a light heart and a sound body, dear to our school-boyhood and our less leisured youth—*ἄλμα ποδωκείην δίσκον ἄκοντα πάλην*—but no serious man could place these mere exercises of muscle beside the mounting into the supermundane world of ice, the inexhaustible visions and meditations amidst those unearthly solitudes.

We speak lastly of the most ancient and, in the vulgar sense, the most honourable of our national games—the slaughter of wild (or tame) animals. This pursuit, though followed doubtless by the herd chiefly out of fashion, prejudice, or pride—the half-savage heirloom of our Norman conquerors—has yet been found with many to supply a very health-giving occupation, and to minister some not unuseful relaxation to the mind. Nay, men not otherwise irrational have been known to take a keen relish in the mere snaring of the lithe salmon, in the bagging of the toothsome grouse, in the stalking of the wary buck ; nay, even in the very worrying of an otter or a hare. Such

is the force of habit and inveterate sanction of opinion ! Far be it from any man—be he Rufus or Jaques—to gainsay the fragrant glow of life which the heather sheds, the zest of a sportsman's hard day, or the charm of the angler's haunt. Yet, it seems to us, all these were better if unpolluted with the torture of poor brutes ; if blood and quivering plumes did not stain the purple heath ; if eyes which delight in glen and moor did not kindle yet more brightly over the dying shudder of the deer ; if the spell of some haunted pool were not snapped by the writhing of the torn trout. A true lover of Nature, one thinks, might seek her better than through the agonies of the beautiful creatures which she nurtures. Let him who loves these things take his fill of them to his heart's lust—but let him not dare to compare his joys with the unbloody raptures of the Alpine climber, whose only quarry is the visible glory of this earth, whose ardour needs not to be whetted by the scream of any tortured thing, whose love of nature is not debased by the animal instincts of destruction.

Indeed, if wounding and killing be the height of manliness, let us not forget some time-honoured pastimes, relics mostly of the same hunters' or fighters' instinct—where at any rate the sportsman or player hazards as much as he aims for, and hits at least a game that can hit him—fencing, sword-play, cudgel-playing, tilting or wrestling, and why not boxing and fisticuffs?—nay, if the worrying brutes to death be so fascinating an amusement, let us say at once dog-fighting, rat-hunting, cock-fighting, badger-drawing, and the other accomplishments of your lordly blackguard—indeed a whole crowd of the lower field or turf sports, innocent or vicious, simply mirthful or simply cruel, but all not by the rational man to be spoken of in the same breath with the finer exercises of sense, the truly intellectual joys of the flesh.

That some such sport, pastime, or relief is very necessary in our present civilisation—some such unloosing of the brain-fibre and tension of the muscle-fibre—is plain to any man yet possessing muscle or brain to be acted on. Our

mode of life is all too feverish and unwholesome to be sustained without due intervals for the oxygenation of the blood and the phosphorisation of the brain. We must rise now and then, like the whales, to a purer medium. After the ignoble modern fashion, we have got to look on mere bodily training as a luxury or a vanity, and the old religious culture of the manly powers by the Greeks is turned into a jest or a byword. Half the poetic value of life is lost amidst this sordid unrest of the mind. In those ages when education meant something wider than the mastication of tough grammars and the 'damnable iteration' of figures, the cultivation of the bodily capacities was brought into unison with the lessons of all civic virtues and manly duty. This welding of courage, strength, and thought, was held to be the training most worthy of the freeman and the citizen ; and through such exercises men grew up to no small force and worth of character, and to a fine balance of the whole vital powers. The time is yet far distant when to keep the due force and equilibrium of the

body will be held as one of the religious duties ; but even we—we in our hectic state of mental restlessness—even we need some pauses from intellectual agitation, some brief bursts of physical exertion.

But as if, after all, any of the higher forms of bodily exercise were simply so much mere gratification of the senses or simple animal impulses. As if there were such things in this sense as mere physical enjoyments. Why, they spring equally from some of the finest and purest parts of our nature. They kindle in us some of the healthiest yearnings of the heart, and the subtlest of our intellectual musings. Nay, a mere autumn walk along a wooded hill-side nourishes brain, spirit, and body at once ; and opens to us from all sources together new well-springs of life. Half the best thoughts of our modern poets, of our artists, our musicians, our teachers, have been lit up by this—the simplest, truest source of inspiration.

Not, of course, that mere tension of muscle or sudorification of the skin has in it such

virtue. Mere exercise at crank-work would hardly avail. The mind must be unbent whilst the sinews are being tightened. A new sphere must be sought, a new atmosphere must be breathed. And of all these grounds the Alps offer us the most new and strange, the most exhilarating, the most instructive, the most ennobling. It is not bodily rest alone which is needed by the jaded son of letters, law, or science. He requires most his spirit to be refreshed—bathed in new life—not simply relaxed. He needs to lay aside memory, forethought, contrivance, and method—to shake his shoulders free from the yoke of habit—to step down from the treadmill of convention on to the fresh sod of his mother earth. The dull mechanic round of life grates so hardly on the free spirit, that to live it must escape sometimes from its cage, and soar up exulting to the gates of heaven. We live for the most part in a very iron mask of forms. Our daily ways are at bottom so joyless, so trite, so compulsory, that we must be free and simple sometimes, or we break. Our present world is a

world of remarkable civilisation, and of very superior virtue, but it is not very natural and not very happy. We need yet some snatches of the life of youth—to be for a season simply happy and simply healthy. We need to draw sometimes great drafts of simplicity and beauty. We need sometimes that poetry should be not droned into our ears, but flashed into our senses. And man, with all his knowledge and his pride, needs sometimes to know nothing and to feel nothing, but that he is a marvellous atom in a marvellous world.

Now there are yet various reasons which make keen physical exertion not merely necessary for our muscular and animal system, but essential also to our moral nature. Our high material civilisation is always tending towards the point where it might annihilate those mundane conditions which make the human powers what they are. Our intellects—nay, our very virtues, would ere long rot or run to seed, were the necessity for effort—and all effort is ultimately concentrated in muscular effort—were all effort banished from the world.

The human race will be drawing towards a bad end when no one ever runs any risks or fatigues, no one ever feels too hot or too weary, and never sees a fellow-being in want of a strong arm and resolute self-sacrifice. Nothing can be more false than the silly old quibble, that an increase of cultivation takes the manhood and heart out of the advancing generations. But there would soon be truth in this venerable lie, if it were to turn out that increased cultivation made the sterner qualities of manhood superfluous and obsolete. So long as this planet remains what it is, there will always come times in a man's life when he needs for himself and for others that reasonable disregard of pain and of life, that insensibility to physical privation, that lightning readiness of hand and eye, that dogged temper of endurance which men have called manliness ever since the days of the Trojan war. Now these things cannot be learned without some practice, and cannot always be practised at a given moment or place. They need much habitual use, at times the most unexpected, and in ways the most perplexing.

To seek after these occasions, to hazard something for them within the judgment of a considerate mind, is a very desirable and indeed essential purpose in these times, and very worthy of the rational man. Hence it is that our time-honoured field-sports and manly games, even if risking something occasionally to life and limb (within the limits of cool sense), are not excusable only, but actively meritorious—not pleasant merely, but positively virtuous ; for by them the sap of man is kept up fresh and pure, and the fibre of our nerves as tough as ever was that of our forefathers.

But, in truth, to decry Alpine climbing as foolhardiness is both very ignorant and very perverse. Its supposed dangers are mere visions of the benighted lowlander. Its real risks are indeed small to the skilful and prudent man. The foolhardy blunderer will find dangers in a street-crossing. The accidents in the Alps are nothing to those of the hunting-field, and even of the moor. Far more men die of gunshot wounds in a month than fall into crevasses in a season. No doubt the Alpine

accidents, when they do happen, are of a very frightful kind. But a man may as well be killed beneath a precipice one thousand feet high as at the bottom of a fenced ditch. Of course, if careless or unpractised persons attempt what skilful climbers can do with ease, they will probably come to a bad end. On this point only serious warning is needed. Once let it be universally understood that to climb glaciers requires special habit, like fencing or skating, and accidents will scarcely be heard of. No one but a fool starts to ride in a steeplechase if he has never taken a gate, or goes out to a battue if he has never handled a gun ; but many a man who has never seen ice, except on a pond, jauntily thinks that what A, B, and C can do he can do much better, and goes like a fool to risk his own and his companion's neck on a difficult *arête*. Such men must be told that ice-climbing requires some special training of hand, foot, eye, and nerve. With these, and reasonable forethought, a healthy man may go anywhere and do anything. Without them all the courage and strength in the world are of no

use, and may only bring a man to a painful and unhonoured end. But the man who, diligently training himself for what he has to do, takes all the measures which a man of sense would, may fairly give full rein to his energies and his fancies in the Alps, and know that he is following some of the best emotions of our nature, and testing some of the most useful qualities we have, without committing any folly of which a wise man need be ashamed, or incurring any risk but that inseparable from every keen exercise, whether of nerve or limb.

Less dangerous than many, more exhilarating than most, and nobler than any other form of physical training, Alpine climbing may surely be *proved to demonstration* to be the best of the modes by which we may refresh, as we must, our jaded animal and sensuous systems. Fighting with mankind in all its modes, real or mimic, has long been set down as a brutalising outlet for our animal energies. The destruction of animals, or all forms of the chase, will soon, we believe, be discredited on somewhat similar grounds. There remains the

better fight, the true scope for our combative capacities, the battle with the earth, the old struggle with the elements and the seasons. To know this strange and beautiful earth as it is, to bask from time to time in its loveliness, to feel the mere free play of life and happiness in the great world of sense, to wrestle with it from time to time in its might, is not the most ignoble occupation of its rational denizens.

Doubtless this opens a wide field, and includes the exercise of nearly every human faculty. The knights errant and Crusaders of our day—men how far superior to the ancient—are the voyagers, the discoverers, the pioneers ; some deathless Cook or Kane, or Livingstone or Brooke, who, daring and enduring to the utmost force of human nature, girdles the yet untamed earth, and brings man face to face with his unknown brother. Between such men and one who traverses only some neighbouring moor, if he so much as knows and loves its native flowers and animals, there holds a regular link. And of the more ready modes in which a busy man can feed this passion for earth,

the best is Alpine climbing—the best, not only for the special beauty and variety of scene, but as being that form of nature which fills the spirit most deeply with emotion, and awes it into simplicity and seriousness. Oh, unforgotten hours, for how many causes is your memory dear! What can a man say who struggles to recall you?—how tell, how remember with method or completeness the full measure of exhilaration—

Trasumanar significar per verba
Non si poria—

the tramp in silence under the morning stars ;
the hush which precedes the dawn, and the
glowing circles of sunlight round the distant
peaks ; the ring of the crisp ice in the early
morn ; the study of the path, and the halt
merry with shouts and jests ; the snatched
meal, preposterous but delicious ; the grappling
with some mad ice-torrent, and the cunning
path wound upwards through a chaos of *séracs* ;
the wild and fairy loveliness of cavern and
chasm ; then the upward strain across some
blinding wall of snow ; the crash of the ice-axe

Quoted in
N.Y. Times

and the whirr of the riven blocks ; the clutch at the hewn step ; the balanced tread along the jagged ridge ; the spring at the last crag, and then the keen cheer from the summit ?

What a summit ! what a reward for work ! —the world as it were, and all that it holds, the plains and hills, the lakes, rivers, towns, villages, meadows and vineyards, myriads of peaks snow-tinted, and valleys infinite, opening before the amazed eyesight in circle beyond circle, and all around and beneath broad wastes of snow and unimaginable gulfs. And then comes home to the dullest a sense of awe at standing thus looking out over the earth amidst force so portentous and expanse so vast —a creature oneself how slight, how ignorant, and yet how strong and sovereign ! Then, filled through and through with awe and joy, the last look taken, one turns again to work, to the mad whirl of the glissade, the still more treacherous descent, the dripping glacier-bridge at noon, the effaced footprints, the cheery tramp through slush and snow, happy and bespattered, stumbling and laughing, drenched

and merry—the tread at last on the springing turf as on that of a long unseen home ; the first mosses, the highest pines, and the log huts, one after another ; the first few and ever-increasing marks of man and cultivated earth and civilised existence, the blessed signs of human life and social aid, the nestling village, huts and barns, the long files of gentle herds, the half-golden patch of corn, the quaintly poised bridge, the lowly roof and flashing cross of the village church, the kindly ‘good night’ of the peasant, the simple welcome and the homely glow of the hospitable hearth.

In speaking of the peculiar merits of mountaineering, a man knows hardly where to begin, much less where to stop. To take the human fellowship it gives by itself, there is surely no form of exercise or sport which brings a man so closely into contact with so high a class of companions. In the hard work of life men are never thrown into society with their labouring fellow-men except under the rigid circumstances of our artificial life, which make a true sense of brotherhood, much more mutual

friendship, practically impossible. Men of education and of wealth meet their toiling brothers only as employers, as rulers, as teachers,—never, by the nature of things, as friends.

Here and there a nature peculiarly tender or peculiarly genial can take and press the rough hand with genuine sympathy. But for the most part the routine of social life is too strong for us, and we get all drilled into a stolid notion that we form but the grades of an army, not a family of brothers. The essential manhood is lost to us under the distinctions of uniform. It becomes something frightful, demoralising, and cruel, that in no moment of our lives do we stand beside our poor and ignorant neighbours, and feel that each rests solely on the native qualities of man. There can be no better thing for a man than now and then to have the great facts thrust upon him, to be able even for an instant to come down to the subsoil of simple manhood, to feel a genuine friendship for men utterly unlike him, and in every point of cultivation utterly inferior.

Nowhere does one do this so fully as when thrown with the higher class of Alpine guides. No doubt it is the pride and charm of all forms of seafaring, that it breeds a very real communion between all who share the ship's work. Sportsmen, especially in the Highlands, speak with enthusiasm of their huntsmen, gillies, and keepers. No doubt our brutalising field-sports have this gentler side. But none of these men can for one moment compare in qualities and character with the best sort of Alpine guide, and no intercourse can compare with that of the mountaineer and his attendants.

It is very easy to laugh at the many vagabonds whom Switzerland, like any other tourist-swarmed country, must breed. But the men who head glacier parties are almost without exception men of character, intelligence, and ambition. They are, in fact, the choicest flower of the mountain peasantry. No man gets high rank amongst them except he possesses a combination of sterling qualities. He must be full of patience, ingenuity, observation, nerve, and zeal. All who know these men well

can say what sterling cultivation of mind, what consummate fortitude and perfect self-control they have attained, and, above all, what tenderness and often poetry of nature they unconsciously put forth. Many of them, with all their faults, have a fine simplicity of spirit, and in one or two there is the truly heroic mould.

Let it be said again that one is speaking only now of the first-rank men, such as mountaineers alone meet. There are few who have ever spent a fortnight with one of these men but have felt themselves warmed by the contact with a temper of true worth; and no occupation ever promotes intercourse so frank and complete as that of Alpine climbing. In the long and important expeditions one is often for a week, ten days, or even a month, almost alone with one's guides upon the mountains. Day and night all march, rest, eat, and sleep side by side, share one flask and one rug, and drag each other alternately across a crevasse. For, be it remembered, the trust and help is continuous and mutual. Men tied together by a rope on the side of an ice precipice soon

come to understand each other's natural tempers and gifts, and care singularly little for the artificial accidents. Conventional reserve, however thickly coated, shrivels off from men who owe each other their lives several times a day.

It is strange how naturally it comes to shake the horniest and the grimest of hands which are strong enough to drag one out of a treacherous crevasse. A week or two spent with men like these, listening to their songs, tales, and jokes, seeing their habits of observation, interested in their skill, giving full rein to the sense of trust, sympathy, and fellow-feeling, is to go down to the root of the matter in human nature. Day by day one wonders afresh at their doglike instinct of place, their more than doglike faithfulness, their readiness in contrivance and fertility of resource, their quickness and zeal in meeting the wants of the moment, and one lives over again some of the earliest of our fancies, and remembers the stories of poetry and fiction, the old trapper of Cooper, the old highlanders of Scott, the old

voyagers and discoverers, and the inimitable Crusoe of our childhood.

The great feature of the higher Alpine levels is that they are utterly unlike everything to which we are accustomed elsewhere. Those who make the ordinary tours in Switzerland survey panoramas of mountain tops from the Faulhorn, Pilatus, or Eggischhorn. They get their ideas of glaciers from a visit to the Jardin or a stroll over the Aletsch, and come home without the dimmest conception of the sensation of passing two or three days successively in the higher altitudes of the Alps. It is a world in which all the conditions of life are changed, and which has a peculiar character almost impossible to realise. It is not of course a question of comparative beauty. The entire Alpine range, from the crests of Mont Blanc or Ortler Spitz down to the most distant spur which bathes in the waves of Geneva or Como, is exquisitely beautiful, and he is no true lover of mountain scenery who is not alternately delighted by its ever-varying forms, who is blind to the sacred calm of the

lowland plains or the legendary watch-towers of Freiburg or Lucerne. Perhaps as a simple question of perfection of landscape, no Swiss view really equals those of the middle elevation above the Lake of Lucerne. These are scenes which affect us by their beauty, and which delight every sense at once.

In the upper snow-world (if less beautiful) there is a mystery and force which has an overpowering effect upon human nature. It does what Aristotle tells us it is the function of tragedy to do, to purify the soul by sympathy and terror. The strangeness and vastness of everything strike on one like a natural portent, as a whirlwind or an earthquake might rouse us and shake off from us everything but the first simple facts of human life. The absolute stillness and absence of all life, animal or vegetable, the sense of solitude lasting all day and day after day, the sense of the infinite which trampling on continual snow produces, the dazzling effect of perpetual snow-fields, the need of constant effort to keep up animal life, the weird extravagance and the vast scale of the

ice-shapes, the unnatural freshness of the air, and, above all, the sense of being out of and above the earth, and of looking down over many kingdoms and tracts that make segments in the map of Europe—these things completely lift a man out of ordinary life, and affect him as does solitude in an Eastern desert, in the midst of the Atlantic, on the prairie, or in Arctic latitudes.

We have all often heard and often tried to realise the effect on the imagination and the heart which these scenes are said by all great travellers to produce ; how, with a force beyond words, the majesty and mystery of earth then strikes into the beholder ; how, with a force beyond words, he feels the native and kingly energy of human nature. This and all that belongs to it—a sensation as fresh as Adam's when he woke and for the first time looked out upon the world and asked himself what it was and what he was—such a sensation comes to us in its full force in the upper Alps, and may be felt by one who but a few hours before was in Paris or London. No one

perhaps can say how completely this shock can be felt until he has enjoyed a very common incident in mountaineering—the bivouac at some of the greater heights. It falls to ordinary men rarely to taste the marvellous on this earth so deeply as when camped at night in the midst of one of the loftier snow-fields far above the region of life or vegetation. As one watches the colours of the sunset fade, and peak after peak grow cold and bare, but for some weird lights over the distant ridges, the full mystery of the solitude is borne in upon the mind, and the stillness grows almost intolerable. The total absence of sound, motion, change, or life of any kind, the gradual stiffening of the glacier and the freezing of its streams, the hushing even of the avalanches or the tumbling rock, the bare expanse unstreaked by a cloud, the strange lustre of the stars, the immensity around staring mutely and unchangeably, and which cannot be shut out, seem quite to possess one with the sense of having ventured into some region of nature which is held spellbound in an unbroken night.

A few weeks of life such as this thrown into the midst of a laborious or anxious employment, is certainly the most powerful stimulant and reviving influence which it is possible to apply. There is perhaps no single mode of making holiday in which a busy man can enjoy it in anything like the perfection, with anything like the readiness, one can when in the Alps. Quite apart from the effect of air, exercise, and enjoyment, physical and mental, this powerful renovation of the natural forces is perhaps the most valuable thing to a hard-worked man. Men whose whole lives are passed in brain-work, for a short season find themselves realising the condition of the millions who labour for their daily bread, and whose lives depend on their manual activity. Men whose existence is so utterly artificial that social forms acquire to them the force of laws of nature, are suddenly placed in positions where these social forms are as preposterous as they would be in a battle or a shipwreck.

Of the vast numbers of tourists who visit Switzerland every year, there are few who do

not go up to or even upon some of the more famous glaciers ; and it is indeed strange, that of all these scarcely one in a thousand brings away the slightest notion of what the glaciers of the higher level are like. The true *névé*, such as that which forms the basin of the Aletsch or the Findelen, the Lysjoch or the Grand Plateau, is as much superior in strangeness and vastness to the ordinary ice-falls as the billows of the Atlantic surpass the chopping seas of the Channel. It is only in the grander forms of the *névé* that the glory of the snow-world is revealed. There, indeed, in some huge amphitheatre of mountain ranges not less than 20 or 30 miles in circuit, buttressed by peaks each rising to 13,000 or 14,000 feet, the sweeps of the ice-sea roll on unbroken, yawning in places into chasms that stretch for miles, each broad and deep enough to engulf a navy. There only the dazzling purity of the true snow-region can be felt, freed from the *débris*, the moraines, the incrustations of the lower glaciers ; all is absolutely spotless, and, as far as the eye can reach,

without a vestige of any coarser substance than the driven snow. Fanciful as are the contortions of the lower ice-falls, they can give scarcely an idea of the marvels of the true region of the *névé*. There the whole body of the glacier for miles appears as if, by the craft of some superhuman race, it had been moulded and reared into stupendous castles, palaces, cathedrals, and cities of pure ice—half ruined, half unfinished—gorgeous Palmyras, as it were, or Colosseums of crystal ; with column piled on column, and arch above arch ; buttressed towers, pinnacles, and minarets, porches, corridors, cloisters, and halls, in vista beyond vista lengthening out ; transparent lakes of clear water deeply imprisoned amidst towering icebergs ; all, from base to crest, blazing with frosted filagree and fretwork ; dropping down with frozen festoons, tracery, and shafted stalactites of ice. It is a region in which, by some magic, all that is beautiful and impressive in form seems piled with profuse abundance, and transfigured into every hue of azure and every tone of living light. Not to be looked

upon, but to be felt, are these gigantic and dazzling masses as one is engulfed in them, or threads the snow-bridge delicately poised over a chasm, or follows the unerring instinct of the guide through endless labyrinths and icy ruins.

There is perhaps no ground on which the wonderful instinct which long physical training produces can be so perfectly watched—not even in the Deal pilot steering his boat through a gale—as in the superior Alpine guide winding his course across an ice-torrent, following with unerring sagacity the only possible line of track, foreseeing everything, watchful of everything, and fertile in everything. His boldness can be matched only by his patience, and his unwearied providence only by his lightning quickness of eye and hand. There is about the climbing of the higher glaciers an inexhaustible variety of incident and condition. There is a charm in each, but the greatest charm is in their continually changing combinations. Eye, ear, and brain are constantly called into play. There is the perpetual demand for new plans and expedients ;

ever fresh surprises in the path, the atmosphere, and the scene ; successions of strange sights and sounds ; the roar of the subglacial river, the ripple of the surface rills, and the plunge of the glacier wells, the boom of the avalanches, and the peal of the glacier rents all day long ; the whistling of the hewn fragments down an ice incline ; the snow whirlwinds eddying round a windy crest ; the white, treacherous storm-cloud, whirled up suddenly from the valley, and again as suddenly torn open, and revealing the whole gleaming panorama as if the curtain of heaven's gate were being drawn back ; the cry occasionally of an eagle, or the distant glimmer of a chamois, and every sight and sound, from the most majestic to the most familiar, from the tempest reverberating round the chain of peaks down to the weird blaze of azure light which shoots up from beneath each print of the foot or of the axe.

So great an abundance of material for study and thought is there in the Alps, in the geological, vegetable, and animal worlds, that it would well occupy a life of observation

and reading. On the glaciers alone a whole literature, a whole branch of science has been bestowed. As ever acting and changing agents of vast geologic movements, they possess an interest which perhaps no other natural force but volcanoes affords. And whereas volcanoes are singularly capricious and bear hardly any personal examination, glaciers are, of all the mundane forces, among the most constant and the most accessible. There is something about the ambiguous character of glaciers—half solid, half fluid—that is very fascinating. There is something so difficult to grasp in the fact of huge tracts of earth, as broad and lofty perhaps as one of our English mountain ranges, yet heaving and working with all the ceaseless life of an ocean. To the experienced observer the glacier seems to have its waves, its tides, and its currents, like a sea, both on its surface and down to its basin. In no other mode can be watched the heaving of the earth's crust visibly, and the machinery of geologic change in actual operation. And it is this union of vast extent with movement—of force and vitality—which

makes the study of the glacier so ever fresh and so impressive to the merest scrambler as to the man of science.

Glaciers, as is well known, form but one branch of the Alpine studies. The animal branch is naturally the least abundant in material, but even that possesses the mark of speciality as retaining yet in the midst of Europe some traces of long bygone animal eras. However, the vegetation affords matter for first-rate investigation. If other spots in the world offer more extraordinary types, there are perhaps no regions in Europe where in so small an area such a varying series of climates and consequently of plants can be seen. But quite apart from the richness or beauty of its flora or its fauna, an Alp offers a peculiar character to all observation. The conditions under which these exist are for the most part so special that both fill the least observant with new interest and the student with new suggestions. There is a poetry and a pathos in an Alpine rose or gentian, as we see it the sole organic thing amidst vast inorganic masses,

the sole link of life between us and the most gigantic forms of matter. At home, the brightest of birds or insects scarcely awakens a thought in a summer's walk, but a stout man's heart and even eye may be softened by the sight—say of a poor stranded bee on the snows, blown forth and shipwrecked amidst those pitiless solitudes.

In all the aerostatic phenomena, the Alps, as is well known, take the first rank as the observatories of science. It is as difficult for the student to fail of new ideas in their midst as for the most heedless tourist to fail to learn something. The great physical forces form there the very conditions of existence. The veriest scrambler gets to record something of atmospheric facts and changes. And here it is but fair to say that Alpine climbers in general, and the Alpine Club in particular, have given a very useful impulse to popular science, and even in some cases to science proper. It is simply ridiculous to suggest that most of them climb with any scientific purpose, any more than men hunt to improve the breed of horses.

It is the special value of Alpine climbing that it combines a great variety of objects. And whereas some men pursue it for health, for exercise, for mere adventure or enjoyment, for the wonderful exhilaration it affords, for the poetry, for the solemnity and the purity of the emotions it awakens, some find there the richest field for their serious labours, and nearly all find much that gives matter for profitable thought. Indeed, a ground which, if to many it but affords recreation and rest, has been the scene of the studies of the Saussures, the Agassizs, the Beaumonts, the Forbeses, the Tyndalls, the Huxleys, the Ruskins, the Tschudis, the Studers, the Berlepschs, must be one which has equal promise for every mind and every character.

But it is not, after all, as being rich in science, nor simply as being lovely in scenery, that the Alps are chiefly marked. It is more that they form as it were an epitome of earth, and place before us in the range of a summer day's walk every form of natural object and production in the most striking and immediate

contrast. Within a few hours after leaving the most terrible forms of ruin, desolation, and solitude, where no life is found and man can remain but for a few hours, the traveller is in the midst of all the luxuriant loveliness of Italian valleys and lakes, basking in an almost tropical heat, surrounded by the most delicate flowers, ferns, and shrubs, and charmed into mere rest by ever-varied landscapes, softer and more fairy-like than Turner ever drew. Indeed, after some weeks of rough work amidst the glaciers, it is impossible to resist the emotion of grateful delight with which one recognises the overflowing richness of this earth amidst the sights, the sounds, the perfumes, and the myriad sensations of pleasure with which life on the Italian lakes is full. No one can taste these wholly who has not borne the heat and burden of the day, the toil and cold of the Alpine regions. Then only is one able to see the glory and profusion of Nature as a whole, and to conceive in one act of thought, and feel but as one manifold sensation, all that she has most strange and most beautiful, from the Arctic zone to the Tropics.

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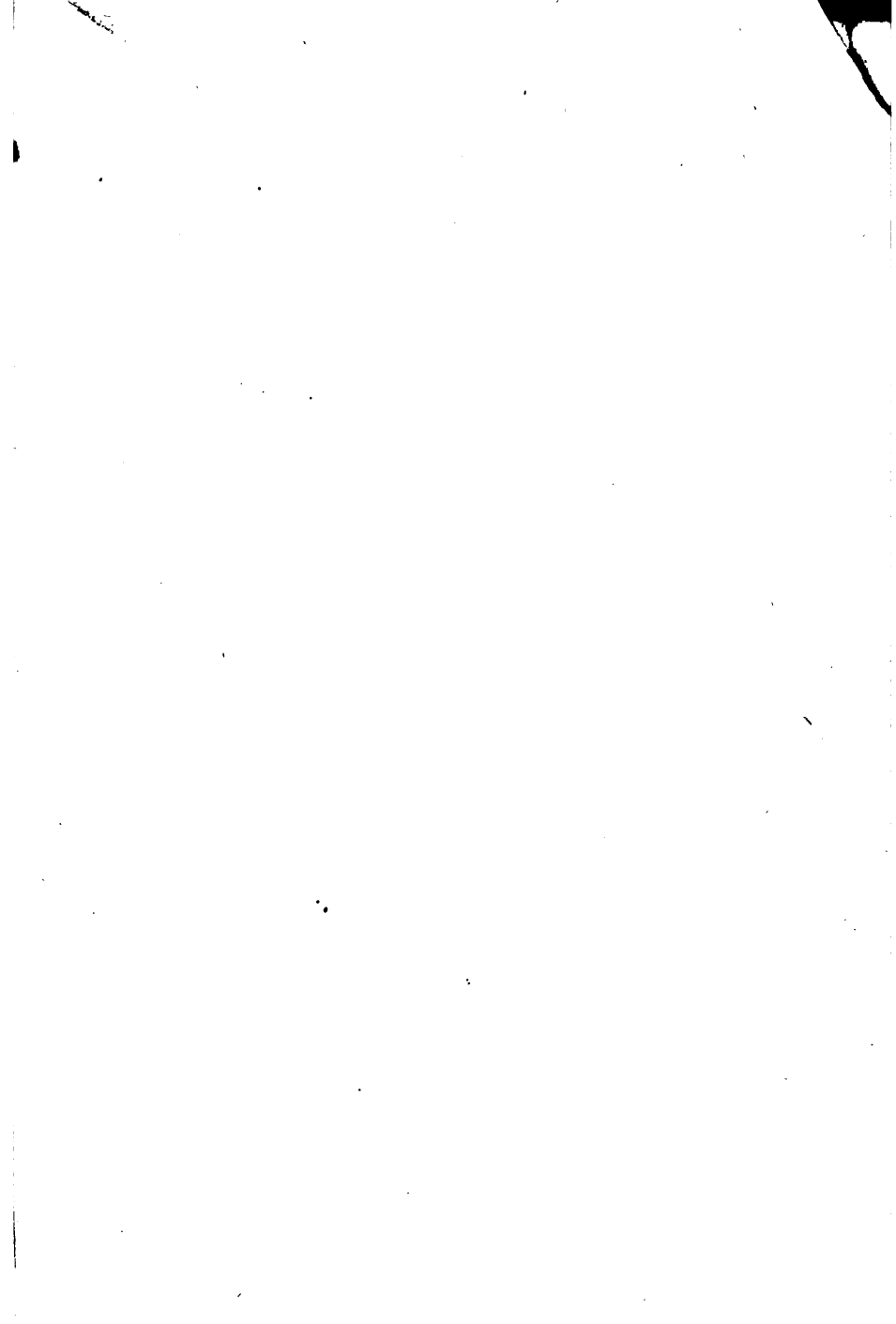
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